

UNAM Adopts a Community Program Education in Practice: A Socially Accountable Model

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Abstract

Health inequities in Mexico remain a major challenge, particularly in marginalized communities where social, cultural, and structural barriers limit access to care. The UNAM Adopts a Community program, led by the Faculty of Medicine of the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM), offers an interdisciplinary and socially accountable model to improve health and quality of life. Rooted in the history of medical social service and aligned with global frameworks such as the Alma-Ata Declaration, the Ottawa Charter, and the Sustainable Development Goals, the program integrates medical, social, educational, environmental, and technological strategies.

Social service interns from diverse disciplines—including medicine, nursing, nutrition, social work, psychology, engineering, and environmental sciences—work directly with communities through participatory diagnoses and continuous feedback. Organized into seven strategic lines (UNAMos Initiatives), the program promotes primary health care, digital inclusion, sustainable economies, gender equality, environmental awareness, and strategic partnerships.

By fostering empowerment, equity, and sustainability, UNAM Adopts a Community benefits both residents—through prevention and resilience—and students, who gain skills in teamwork, communication, and social responsibility.

Introduction

Starting health-related programs with a strong social accountability focus is critical for an equitable and sustainable impact, but there are several key challenges that often arise. Here are the main problems commonly encountered: weak community engagement; lack of political will and government support; limited transparency and access to information; insufficient capacity at the local level; cultural and social barriers; fragmented and siloed health systems; corruption and misuse of resources; short-term focus and donor dependency; inadequate monitoring and evaluation; and security and political instability. Health programs may be designed and implemented without meaningful input from the communities they intend to serve. This leads to programs that do not reflect local needs, are mistrusted, or are underutilized. Power imbalances,

lack of participatory structures, or poor understanding of social accountability mechanisms may also occur. (1-7)

Program Overview

To address these gaps, the UNAM Adopts a Community program was launched in 2025 by the Facultad de Medicina, or Faculty of Medicine, of the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM). It responds to persistent health and social challenges in marginalized communities by integrating continuous feedback and improvement. The program adopts a collaborative, interdisciplinary, and community-centered approach that goes beyond medical care to address socioeconomic, cultural, and environmental determinants of well-being.

The initiative brings together social service interns from medicine, nursing, social work, education, environmental sciences, and other disciplines. The focus is on active community participation—working alongside residents to identify priorities, co-develop interventions, and build local capacity. This fosters empowerment, ownership, and long-term sustainability.

Aligned with Primary Health Care (PHC) principles, the program promotes preventive care, health education, and the integration of health into broader development goals. It benefits communities through improved services and students through real-world experience, interdisciplinary collaboration, and social responsibility. (8)

Background and Framework of the Program

The program builds on Mexico's history of medical social service, initiated in 1935–36 by Dr. Gustavo Baz Prada from the UNAM, and made a constitutional requirement in 1945 to provide care to underserved populations and understand rural realities. Over time, placements diversified, but concerns arose about drifting from the original goals. (9,10)

UNAM's Institutional Commitment

The UNAM Development Plan 2023–2027 prioritizes the comprehensive and mental health of its community. It focuses on social responsibility through programs like UNAM Adopts a Community, involving partnerships with governments and NGOs. (11)

The Faculty of Medicine Work Plan 2024–2028. Under Dr. Ana Carolina Sepúlveda, the plan emphasizes social linkage and health education, collaboration across faculties (e.g., Nursing, Social Work), and alignment with national health needs and policymaking. (12)

Global Best Practices

Internationally, the program aligns with:

- Alma-Ata Declaration (1978) – Health as a human right, PHC, and community participation. (13-17)

- Ottawa Charter (1986) – Empowerment, healthy policies, supportive environments, community action. (18)
- Sustainable Development Goals (2015) – Particularly SDG 3 (health) and related goals in education, equality, environment, and partnerships. (19-21)
- Social Determinants of Health (SDH) frameworks – Highlighting how living conditions, education, and equity affect outcomes. (22)

It also draws on global best practices like WHO’s One Health, Partners in Health, Marmot Cities, and Blue Zones, as well as national models such as the Mérida Health Education Program and the 2017 Family Medicine Social Service Strategy. (23-30)

Justification

The Primary Health Care (APS) and Health Promotion (PS) frameworks are key to improving public health through preventive and holistic approaches. In Mexico, where health care access is often limited, particularly in rural and vulnerable areas, addressing inequalities through sustainable initiatives is essential. One such initiative is the UNAM Adopts a Community program, designed to have a lasting impact on underserved communities.

The program addresses inequalities through an interdisciplinary model involving interns from multiple fields to meet communities’ medical, social, psychological, and economic needs. It also responds to pressing issues like population growth, geographic isolation, minimal supervision, and rising violence.

Legal and Normative Framework for the Program

The program operates within:

- International Frameworks: Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Agenda 2030, International Health Regulations.
- National Frameworks: Mexican Constitution, General Health Act, patient rights laws, and Official Mexican Standards (NOMs).
- Institutional Frameworks: UNAM’s commitment to education, research, and social service, emphasizing interdisciplinarity and societal benefit.

Objectives of the Program

General Objective

Implement an interdisciplinary, community-based program involving social service interns to improve health, quality of life, equity, and sustainable development.

Specific Objectives

1. Conduct community diagnoses to identify health and social priorities.
2. Form interdisciplinary teams of interns to address issues holistically.
3. Design and apply Primary Health Care (APS) interventions tailored to community needs.
4. Improve residents’ quality of life using sustainable strategies.
5. Promote digital development and technology access.
6. Support local economic development initiatives.
7. Foster human rights, equity, and gender equality through community workshops.
8. Create sustainability strategies (water, energy, waste).
9. Establish alliances with strategic partners to strengthen program impact.

Program Description – “UNAMos” Initiatives

The UNAM Adopts a Community program is an interdisciplinary initiative aimed at improving health and quality of life in vulnerable communities across Mexico. It engages social service interns from various disciplines—such as medicine, education, social work, and environmental sciences—to deliver comprehensive, community-focused solutions based on social responsibility.



Program Structure & Strategy: "UNAMos" Initiatives

The program is implemented through seven strategic lines called “UNAMos”, each addressing a key area of community development:

1. UNAMos Families – PHC, health education, empowerment.
2. UNAMos Smiles – Well-being in physical, social, and emotional domains.
3. UNAMos Technologies – Digital inclusion and innovation.
4. UNAMos Resources – Sustainable economic initiatives.
5. UNAMos Equality – Human rights and gender equality.
6. UNAMos Sustainable Communities – Environmental sustainability.
7. UNAMos Efforts – Strategic alliances.

Components (Medicine Focus)

Primary Health Care and Education – Consultations, chronic disease support, health workshops.
Health Days – Screenings, prevention campaigns, educational activities.

This program not only benefits the communities by addressing their multidimensional needs but also provides practical, real-world experience for UNAM students, enhancing their skills in health promotion, teamwork, and community engagement.

Sustainability Strategies

Community involvement, capacity development, partnerships, diversified funding, efficiency, monitoring, adaptability, and promotion of autonomy ensure long-term impact.

Methodology

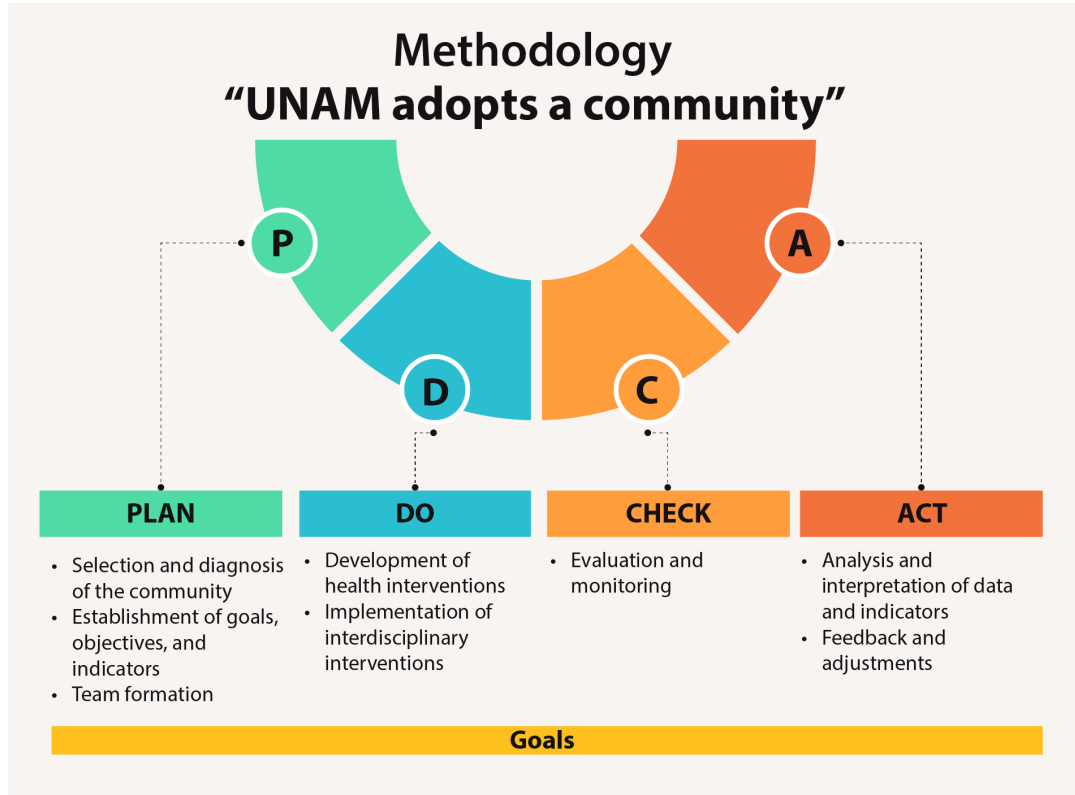
The UNAM Adopts a Community program is designed to improve living conditions in underserved communities through a comprehensive, interdisciplinary, and sustainable health model. It employs two key frameworks for planning and evaluation:

SMART Objectives (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, Time-bound)

Deming Cycle (PHVA): Plan, Do, Verify, Act — a continuous improvement model

Methodology Overview

Phases: Planning (needs assessment, team formation), Implementation (interventions, engagement), Evaluation (monitoring, documentation), Adjustment (modifications, sustainability).



Interdisciplinary Participation

Fields include medicine, nursing, nutrition, psychology, dentistry, physiotherapy, veterinary medicine, social work, architecture, engineering, economics, and communication. The IMSS-Welfare system provides spaces for operations.

The UNAM Adopts a Community program not only addresses immediate health and social issues but also fosters long-term, community-led development and sustainability. The following key variables and performance indicators are used to measure the effectiveness, quality, and impact of the program’s interventions in community health, development, and sustainability.

Variables

Health diagnosis, health status, quality of life, interdisciplinary team, comprehensive development, sustainable development, equity, and community empowerment are key variables.

Indicators

Key metrics track empowerment, workshop completion, health outcomes, participation in technology and trade training, equality promotion, environmental practices, and partnership engagement.

Planning and Application

Coordinated by UNAM's Faculty of Medicine with state health services, planning covers operations, training, and interdisciplinary integration. Implementation includes health education, data collection, and community engagement.

Supervision and Evaluation

Regular site visits, monitoring tools, feedback loops, and continuous improvement ensure quality. The annual cycle includes:

- Phase 1 (Months 1–3): Diagnosis, partnerships, training.
- Phase 2 (Months 4–9): Leader training, health events, workshops.
- Phase 3 (Months 7–12): Supervision, strategy execution, data analysis, reporting.

Strategic Partners

Include UNAM interdisciplinary team from diverse faculties and institutes, the State of Mexico Health Secretariat, and external partners such as non-governmental organizations (NGOs), private sector (i.e., Santander, Carlos Slim Foundation), FUNSALUD, and PAHO, to name a few, providing resources, training, infrastructure, and support.

Conclusion

UNAM Adopts a Community is a socially accountable, interdisciplinary model addressing health and social needs through active participation, sustainability, and partnership. By integrating academic knowledge with community priorities, it fosters empowerment, equity, and long-term development in Mexico's most vulnerable areas.

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