

VSA Assignment Description

Assignment Title	Logistics Mentor (Pharmacy)
Country	Bougainville
Location of Partner	Buin
Organisation	
Partner Organisation	Buin Health Centre (Department of Health, Autonomous Bougainville Government)
Duration	6 – 12 months
Sustainable Development Goals	

1. Partner organisation overview

The Autonomous Bougainville Government (ABG) Department of Health (DoH) has its headquarters in Buka town centre. The DoH administers its services to the different districts of Bougainville, one of these being the Buin District in Southern Bougainville. The Buin Health Centre (BHC) is situated in Buin town and serves as the only health centre in the southern part of Bougainville. BHC is a 38 bed District Health Centre in Buin District. BHC receives referrals from surrounding health facilities and has a primary catchment population of approximately 36,000 people and a secondary catchment of 80,000. It in turn refers to Arawa and Buka Hospital depending on the clinical assessments.

A major barrier to the development of the health sector in Bougainville is a shortage of funding for services and a gap in capacity for service delivery. Given its isolation to the rest of Bougainville, BHC experiences these issues on an increased scale, and provides for increased challenges.

VSA has been working with the DoH for a number of years in other locations across Bougainville, with volunteers previously providing the school of nursing in with financial, technical, and management support. VSA has been working with the BHC since 2019, and most recently had a Nurse Mentor volunteer in 2024.

BHC is staffed by a dedicated and skilled group of local health workers, who still manage to provide a range of health services to the local community despite the lack of funding and resources.

2. Assignment overview

There is currently a single Pharmacist working at BHC. Their role is to ensure supply of medications and other consumables for the entire BHC and Buin Southern District. Additionally, they have responsibility to oversee the safe storage all other medical items used

by the BHC. The Pharmacist also monitors the supply medical items and attempts to procure replacement items when they run out.

Currently, the pharmacy would benefit from some oversight and advice from an experienced volunteer who could mentor the Pharmacist in all aspects of managing a hospital pharmacy facility including basic digital stock management.

Through the direct contributions of a well-placed VSA volunteer, the pharmacy at BHC would operate more efficiently and drugs and vaccines would be monitored and stored safely. These factors would increase the capacity of the BHC as a whole and help move staff towards achieving the above goals by increasing their ability and capacity to deliver a better health care to patients of Southern Bougainville

The pharmacy itself is located in the centre of the facility in a standalone, purpose built 40-year-old building. There are four non-functioning air-conditioning units and a single fan and in sunny weather the building heats up considerably. The windows are louvered and there are remnants of insect screens on some. The main part of the building that houses the medicines is comprised of storage shelves upon which is stacked a multitude of items mostly arranged chaotically. At one end is the dispensing window where patients come to collect medicines and at the other is a room which holds the vaccination fridges.

3. Goal/outcomes/outputs

Goal

The Buin Health Centre Pharmacy operates efficiently, safely storing, and dispensing medication in accordance with PNG National Department of Health Guidelines

Outcome 1

Increase in Patient compliance to their medication and thus effective treatment

BHC provides clear information and guidelines to patients on how to effectively use take/use medication

- Facilitate access by the current pharmacist to national (or other) dispensing guidelines.
- In-service training on aspects of patient education associated with medication compliance.
In conjunction with the local pharmacist:
- Assess the current level of access to and understanding of the national (or other) dispensing guidelines and identify any gaps
- Provide on the job training and mentoring to address these gaps
- Design appropriate materials to education patients about the need to properly take/use medication

Outcome 2

Minimise drugs/antibiotic misuse, prescription errors and no expired stock in pharmacy
The BHC pharmacy has dispensing/pharmacy management guidelines in place that are understood and utilised by staff

- Put in place a set of dispensing/pharmacy management guidelines which would ensure safe dispensing practices and regular stock monitoring.
- Assess the current digital stock management system and support the best approaches to managing this.
- Compile a schedule of activities required to maintain compliance.
 In conjunction with the local pharmacist:
- Assess the current dispensing/pharmacy management processes and practices in place and identify areas for improvement
- Develop a set of dispensing/pharmacy management guidelines
- Provide ongoing mentoring to ensure the guidelines are understood and embedded into daily practice

4. Reporting and working relationships and capacity building

Individuals

BHC pharmacist's capacity to review, change and maintain a fully functioning pharmacy service within the current resource confines, would improve to the extent that he works autonomously.

Organisational

Wider BHC would benefit from the improved dispensing practices leading to increased patient compliance and safety.

BHC pharmacy service would be fully functional ahead of its transition to a new hospital facility in the next 1-2 years.

Stakeholders

Patients attending BHC and those in the wider region would benefit from a pharmacy service which could store, dispense, and distribute all medical supplies efficiently and accurately which should result in an improved health status of the entire community

The volunteer will work directly with the BHC Pharmacist, and will report to the BHC Executive Director.

The volunteer and Buin Health Centre will have an ongoing relationship with the VSA programme manager in terms of assignment monitoring, reporting, professional advice, and personal support.

As needs on the ground may change over time, the volunteer is encouraged to review and update the Assignment Description on arrival in consultation with the partner organisation and VSA Programme Manager. By their very nature, development situations can involve significant change, so it is advisable that the volunteer periodically review and reflect on the Assignment Description throughout the Assignment to ensure the best development outcomes are being achieved.

5. Selection criteria/position requirements

Person specifications (professional)

Essential

- Strong ICT skills
- Experience in stock management
- Experience in supply chain management
- Experience of working collaboratively in a cross-cultural setting
- Experience of mentoring or coaching staff to build capacity
- Strong cross-cultural experience

Desirable

- Experience working in a Pharmacy or dispensary
- Experience in online stock management for pharmaceuticals
- Knowledge of pharmaceutical storage standards
- Someone who has past working experience in a developing country
- Membership of a pharmacists' professional registration body in NZ

Personal specification (personal)

Essential

- Community-minded, with a willingness to learn about, and respect Bougainvillean values and protocols
- A willingness to learn the local language (Tok Pisin)
- A self-sufficient and self-motivating attitude
- The ability to adapt to changing situations, and be flexible to change where factors may be beyond your control
- Resilience
- Willingness to travel to remote locations by and work in rural environments

Desirable

- A sense of humour
- Experience living in a developing country

6. VSA Essential Attributes

- Commitment to volunteering, to VSA and to the partner organisation
- Cross cultural awareness
- Adaptability and a willingness to approach change or newness positively
- Able to form good relationships, both personally and professionally, with work colleagues and in the community
- Resilience and an ability to manage setbacks
- Initiative and resourcefulness
- An ability to facilitate learning through skills exchange

7. Country Context

Autonomous Region of Bougainville – Papua New Guinea

Bougainville is a warm and vibrant Autonomous Region within Papua New Guinea (PNG). It is the easternmost region of PNG and sits on the border with the Solomon Islands. Going back many decades, the region has a strong sense of identity and culture, that is distinct from other parts of PNG, and something that Bougainvilleans are very proud of.

The region was been passed between colonial powers for many years, until being passed from the Australian-administered Territory of New Guinea, to the newly independent nation of Papua New Guinea in 1975. By this time the opencast copper and gold mine at Panguna has started operation, which was one of the largest in the world at the time. The mine quickly came to account for nearly half of PNG's export revenue, underlining the economic importance of Bougainville. However, the mine brought significant environmental and social issues that had not been seen in Bougainville before. By the late 1980s, what begun as a low-scale sabotage campaign to bring about dialogue on compensation for landowners, descended into a complete breakdown in law and order, accompanied by the closure of the mine. In the decade that followed, The Bougainville Crisis became complex in nature, with elements of internal conflict emerging alongside the desire for independence. The signing of the Peace Agreement in 2001 brought the conflict to an end, and in the years since Bougainville has been steadily rebuilding its public and private sectors.

While Bougainville does still have its challenges as it continues to recover from The Crisis, it provides a unique opportunity for dedicated and adventurous volunteers who are skilled in their respective fields to work alongside their local Bougainvillean counterparts to achieve locally-identified development goals. The region is rich in culture and is unbelievably beautiful, with volunteers finding ample opportunities to immerse themselves in all aspects of the local environment.

VSA has been working in Bougainville since 1998, when it entered into Arawa towards the end of the conflict. In the years since, VSA has supported local organisations across a range of sectors including health, education, agriculture, and tourism. VSA has built a strong reputation in Bougainville, and is committed to continuing to work in the region

8. Living Situation

Buin

Buin town is the main town in the Buin District of Southern Bougainville. It is accessed by two roads that lead south from Arawa on both the western and eastern sides of the island. The drive to Buin from Arawa is around 100km takes around 4 hours, depending on the road conditions.

The area around Buin was the focus of significant fighting during World War II, with numerous sites of interest and wrecks still visible today – including the famous aircraft wreckage of Admiral Yamamoto.

After the war, the present-day town of Buin was established inland to the north from its original location. In the late 1960s Buin became the centre of government, commercial, and education activity in Southern Bougainville.

From the 1960-90's Buin was slower to develop than the rest of Bougainville. Road access to Buin was via Panguna and Siwai districts, although a road over Santos pass was eventually constructed. Although large cocoa and copra plantations were established from Arawa north along the north-east coast to and including Buka, such activity did not occur in the Buin region. Further, while the Panguna copper and gold mine brought prosperity to many in central Bougainville and facilitated the development of a modern town in Arawa, Buin did not receive any substantial investment.

During the Bougainville crisis Buin saw some particularly fierce combat, including the 1996 Kangu Beach massacre, which began a chain of events leading to the ceasefire and signing of the peace agreement. Even after the signing of the Bougainville Peace Agreement in 2001, the neighbouring area of Konnou continued to experience its own localised conflict up until 2011.

Prior to the Crisis, Buin was serviced by a small airfield outside of town. Now there are no commercial air services to Buin, although an airstrip on land owned by the Catholic Church is located approximately one kilometre north of the town has recently been upgraded with an occasional charter flight. Volunteers based in Buin travel north to either Arawa or Buka when they are due to fly out of Bougainville.

These days Buin is still a small and quiet town, but there continues to be new ongoing development. Buin has a Police Station and small holding cell, a Courtroom, a Secondary School, a Health Centre, a number of guesthouses and petrol stations. Buin has a small number of stores that stock basic imported groceries (e.g. rice, canned foods, and some frozen foods). The town has a vibrant market that runs on a Thursday and Saturday, and has a plentiful supply of fresh fruit, vegetables, and seafood. There is a small Bank of the South Pacific (BSP) rural branch in Buin, however there is no ATM.

Buin town continues to host a small number of New Zealand Police as part of a joint Community Policing Project that has operated since the signing of the Bougainville Peace Agreement.

Public Motor Vehicles (PMVs) ply the coastal highway to and from Arawa most days (where the nearest VSA volunteers would be based), except Sunday, and costs K50 each way. The trip takes three to four hours or longer depending on the state of the road.

Buin runs a diesel generated town power service which runs for regular hours per day, although power outages for up to a week are still common. The town has mobile phone coverage, with a 3G service on the Digicel network, although network outages are also common. The Buin Urban Council in its infancy and provide few services. There is no town water supply or reticulated sewage collection, and volunteers water supplies come from a roof-collected tank.

Buin has some fascinating attractions that have been seen by few outsiders, including Lake Lololu (a crater lake in the mountains above Buin, which has spiritual significance to the Buin people), the remains of 'little Toyko' (an underground military base that the Japanese Forces,

who held Bougainville for much of WWII, wanted to resettle a larger number of civilian Japanese; several pristine island islands boarding the Solomon Islands; and of course, Admiral Yamamoto's crash site.

On the whole, Buin is a quiet town. With the sorts of sensible precautions applicable to any town almost world-wide, Buin is a safe community.

Additional Information

ST2 Assignment (6-11 months)

Residency status

VSA volunteers must be New Zealand citizens or have New Zealand permanent residency status, and currently living in NZ.

Pre-departure briefing

As part of the volunteer's contract, successful candidates will be required to take part in a pre-departure briefing course run by VSA in Wellington and complete all required pre-reading.

Final appointment

Final appointment will be subject to satisfactory medical and immigration clearances (costs covered by VSA), partner organisation acceptance, and successful completion of the pre-departure briefing course.

Family status

VSA supports partners to accompany volunteers on assignments of six months or longer. However, volunteers with accompanying dependents will not be considered for this assignment.

Fundraising

VSA funding stakeholders are both the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT) and donors. We ask volunteers and accompanying partners to fundraise to help cover the cost of sending volunteers throughout the Pacific and beyond. Fundraising can be as simple as doing something you enjoy with a group or friends, and our Fundraising team is available to help you every step of the way.

Vaccination requirements

Potential volunteers are advised that VSA's insurers require volunteers to be vaccinated, prior to departure, in accordance with the instructions of VSA's medical adviser. VSA covers the cost of any required vaccinations.

Children's Act

While on assignment, VSA volunteers may be required to work with children and/or may choose to participate in informal activities in their own time that involve interactions with children (such as coaching teams or teaching English). VSA is committed to the protection of vulnerable children and adults, which also includes meeting our commitment under the Children's Act 2014.

The information requested during the application process is necessary to assist VSA to determine applicant suitability to work and/or interact regularly with children, and is part of a series of pre-selection checks undertaken on all applicants for VSA assignments.

Volunteer package

The volunteer's package includes the following:

Reimbursements and grants

1. The volunteer may be entitled to an establishment grant to help them set up in their country of assignment, and a rest and respite grant after a specified period of active service in-country to encourage the volunteer to take a break away from the immediate assignment location. These grants depend on the length and location of the assignment. The volunteer's contract will specify any grant entitlements.
2. The volunteer will receive a monthly living allowance of PGK 2,100.

Accommodation

Basic, comfortable furnished accommodation will be sourced by VSA. In some circumstances volunteers may be asked to share accommodation.

Airfares and baggage allowance

VSA will provide the volunteer with economy airfares to and from New Zealand for their assignment plus a baggage allowance.

Insurance

VSA will provide travel insurance to cover baggage and personal property, and non-routine medical expenses for the duration of the assignment. Further details of the insurance cover will be provided during the volunteer pre-departure briefing.

Utilities

VSA will reimburse volunteers reasonable expenses for household utilities while on assignment.

Final terms and conditions relating to the specific volunteer assignment will be confirmed in a personalised volunteer contract.