

Humanitarian Crisis in Bolivia

Situation Report #3

May 28, 2026

Bolivia's deepening crisis has evolved into a humanitarian access emergency as prolonged protests and nationwide road blockades continue to disrupt the movement of food, fuel, oxygen, and critical medical supplies. Public hospitals are facing increasing pressure, and access to lifesaving healthcare is being affected. Project HOPE has deployed an assessment team to Bolivia to evaluate emerging needs, support coordination efforts, and identify response priorities.

Situation Overview

Bolivia is facing a rapidly worsening political and economic crisis marked by over three weeks of protests and road blockades across the country. What started as social unrest has turned into a serious emergency that is blocking the delivery of food, fuel, oxygen, medicine, and other essential medical supplies.

Some basic goods are still available in markets, but shortages of important items like meat and hospital supplies are getting worse. Ongoing blockades on major roads, along with Bolivia's weak transport system and heavy dependence on road travel, are making it very hard to move aid and commercial goods around the country.

The health system is under growing strain, especially public hospitals, which are already contending with limited resources and financial reserves. Even though most protests are meant to be symbolic, blocked access and disrupted supply chains are having serious downstream impacts on health, nutrition, and protection services.

Key Developments

Security Situation

- There have been reports of violence, including attacks on ambulances and health workers.
- While some protests are mostly symbolic, roadblocks are still limiting access to critical services and aid.
- Security operations and protests are making it hard to predict when and where humanitarian workers can operate.
- Talks to resolve the situation are ongoing between the government and oversight bodies such as the Ombudsman's Office.

Key Updates

- Bolivia's political and economic crisis has escalated into a **humanitarian access emergency**, with nationwide road blockades disrupting the delivery of food, fuel, oxygen, and medical supplies for more than three weeks.
- **Public hospitals are facing critical pressure**, including severe oxygen shortages that are reportedly placing at least 45 children in intensive care at immediate risk and disrupting neonatal and emergency care.
- **Food shortages and rising prices are increasing humanitarian needs**, while attacks on ambulances and blocked emergency transport continue to restrict access to lifesaving care.
- Bolivia's Ministry of Health has **requested urgent international humanitarian assistance** amid concerns over the potential collapse of tertiary hospitals in La Paz and El Alto.
- **Project HOPE has deployed an assessment team to Bolivia** to evaluate emerging health and humanitarian needs and identify potential response priorities, such as oxygen system support, essential medical supplies, and health facility assessments.

Humanitarian Concerns

- **Hospitals are running very low on oxygen.** Some have less than 30 hours left, and, on average, health facilities across the country have less than a week's supply.
 - At least 45 children in intensive care are reportedly at immediate risk due to oxygen shortages.
 - Neonatal and pediatric healthcare services are particularly affected due to high needs for oxygen and nutritional support.
- **There are growing shortages of key hospital supplies,** including breathing equipment, masks, syringes, and other items.
- Most essential medicines are still available, but some, such as metformin, are starting to run low.
- Cases of respiratory infections, measles, and chikungunya are putting extra pressure on already overstretched health services.
- **Lack of access to food in hospitals is harming patient care,** including vital nutrition for newborns, and hospitals report rationing meals for both patients and staff.
- Safety risks are rising for both people stuck by the blockades and those on the move, especially in border areas like Oruro.

Humanitarian Access Constraints:

- **Road blockades are severely disrupting transport across the country, making it difficult to deliver oxygen, medical supplies, fuel, and food.**
- Oxygen is in very short supply because Bolivia depends heavily on road transport and has very little production capacity, with only two oxygen suppliers in the whole country.
 - At least four oxygen tanker trucks reportedly cannot cross borders to refill the national supply.
- Ambulances have reportedly been delayed or stopped, even when carrying emergency patients.
- Temporary agreements for “humanitarian pauses” have allowed some deliveries, but these humanitarian corridors are irregular and unreliable.
- Air transport is not a cost-effective way to deliver oxygen because of altitude limits, and current air deliveries meet only a small part of the country's needs.

Economic & Social Impacts

- Food shortages are appearing in different parts of the country, and prices for items like chicken and pork are rising.
- More than two weeks of supply chain disruptions have affected both families and large institutions.
- A lack of foreign currency is making it hard to import medical and other basic supplies.
- Fewer people are going to outpatient appointments, suggesting that people are having increasing difficulties accessing routine health care.
- People who have lost income due to transport and movement problems are in increasing need of humanitarian aid.

Institutional & International Response

- **Bolivia's Ministry of Health has urgently asked for international help,** warning that major hospitals in La Paz and El Alto may soon collapse.
- Authorities may declare a national emergency under the country's risk management law.
- A humanitarian coordination group is active, bringing together United Nations (UN) agencies, the Red Cross, and NGO networks, and coordinating in the following sectors:
 - Health
 - Logistics (led by the UN's World Food Programme and the Red Cross)
 - Food security and nutrition
- The World Food Programme plans to buy basic foods (rice, lentils, beans) to support the most affected communities and health facilities.
- Protection organizations are responding to the increased risk of harm caused by travel disruptions, being stranded, and isolation.
- Humanitarian groups are focusing on:
 - Finding and solving supply chain blockages
 - Moving quickly when short “windows of opportunity” allow access.
 - Resolving gaps in primary healthcare, which have been identified by Oxfam and other NGO partners
- Project HOPE is coordinating directly with the Humanitarian Country Team, the decision-making and oversight forum led by the Health Cluster.

Humanitarian Outlook & Concerns

The situation in Bolivia is likely to remain unstable in the near future, and roadblocks and other transport disruptions are liable to worsen shortages of oxygen, medical supplies, and food. **This dynamic raises the risk of people dying from preventable causes, especially very sick patients and those in vulnerable situations.**

Right now, the main problem facing communities is that humanitarian aid cannot reach people, not that the country has no supplies at all. Humanitarian conditions would likely be able to resolve quickly if humanitarian access is restored. However, because access deals are inconsistent and transport systems are weak, disruptions are likely to continue over the next few weeks.

The main humanitarian concerns at this time include:

- Running out of oxygen in major hospitals
- Worsening access to food and nutrition services in hospitals
- Growing disease outbreaks in underserved communities
- More deaths among newborns, intensive care patients, and people with chronic illnesses

Project HOPE is Assessing

Project HOPE has deployed an assessment team to Bolivia and is actively monitoring the evolving crisis, while participating in coordination discussions with UN agencies, NGOs, and national authorities.

Based on initial findings, priority areas under Project HOPE's consideration include:

- Rapid health facility assessments, particularly in La Paz and Oruro
- Support for oxygen supply systems, including medical consumables and oxygen concentrators
- Provision of essential medical supplies and hospital inputs
- Support for hospital nutrition services, in coordination with food security actors
- Engagement in humanitarian coordination mechanisms, including potential integration into the Health Cluster and broader response architecture

Project HOPE is also assessing operational modalities to support effective and context-sensitive humanitarian engagement, including coordination through local partners and alignment with evolving humanitarian access strategies.