

A MEXICAN MIDWIFE

María Reyes, who lives in Tresquezites in the State of Mexico, has been trained in the *IMSS* midwife program. She can neither read nor write, but every two months she makes the 64 kilometre trip into Toluca for further training in midwifery, contraception, hygiene and sanitation. She earns about US \$30 for each training session. People like María have helped to lower mortality rates and have assisted the National Health Care System to extend its family planning program nationwide. Reyes and hundreds of other rural practitioners in the program, educate their communities about preventive health care, act as liaisons for neighbours who need medical assistance and provide emergency service. The program encourages volunteers to use their knowledge of native herbal remedies. She knows how to administer the herbs and wild plants that can ease headaches, stomachaches or labour pains. The program also supplies her with a medicine kit of birth control supplies for free distribution and information on water purification, toxemia, infant care and AIDS.

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THE MEXICAN INSTITUTE FOR SOCIAL SECURITY

The *Instituto Mexicano del Seguro Social (IMSS)*, Mexican Institute for Social Security, provides health care services under the *Programa Nacional de Solidaridad (PRONASOL)* commonly referred to simply as *Solidaridad*. *Solidaridad* is a key element of the government's National Development Program, and is designed to respond to the needs of the poorest, and often most rural, segments of Mexican society. Rural health assistants are trained in basic care, midwifery, hygiene and nutrition. The trained assistants then work in their communities in the countryside and small villages.

DEPARTMENT OF THE FEDERAL DISTRICT

The *Departamento del Distrito Federal (DDF)*, Department of the Federal District, is the department responsible for Mexico City, and is roughly equivalent to a state government. In 1992, the *DDF* operated a total of 137 units. They included 106 clinics or primary care facilities, and 31 hospitals of which 17 were specialized hospitals.

NATIONAL SYSTEM FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE FAMILY

The *Sistema Nacional para el Desarrollo Integral de la Familia (DIF)*, National System for the Development of the Family, is the main health care entity providing social assistance and care to children, or minors, who are abandoned, homeless, needy, malnourished or abused. The *DIF* operates throughout the country.

DIF services include basic nutrition, family and community development, food programs, and micro-enterprise development assistance for families and communities. The *DIF* also assists disadvantaged adolescents and seniors, pregnant and nursing women with no means of support, and persons with physical disabilities. The *DIF* has been making increasing use of prosthetic devices over the last few years.

