

**David Bryden, director of the Frontline Health Workers Coalition, submitted the following written testimony to the State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs (SFOPS) Appropriations Subcommittee urging them provide \$200 million in the 2024 budget for the Global Health Worker Initiative at USAID.**

This outside witness testimony is in reference to Global Health Programs implemented by the US Agency for International Development (USAID).

The Frontline Health Workers Coalition is an alliance of 42 United States-based and international organizations working together to urge greater and more strategic US and multilateral investments in frontline health workers in low- and middle-income countries as a cost-effective way to save lives and foster a healthier, safer, and more prosperous world.

We believe that every community should have access to health workers trained and supported to provide all essential health services and to prevent, detect, and respond to new and emerging health threats.

**We urge the Subcommittee to support the inclusion of \$200 million in the fiscal year 2024 (FY24) State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs bill to establish and appropriately fund the Global Health Worker Initiative at the US Agency for International Development (USAID).** Twenty-nine leading US organizations have joined our call for this investment in the health workforce in a letter sent to the Chair and Ranking Member on April 11, 2023.<sup>1</sup>

COVID-19 has illustrated that global health threats exist beyond political borders, and an investment in the global health workforce necessary to prevent and respond to the next pandemic is an investment in the security of the United States.

Health workers have made enormous sacrifices and shown tremendous dedication during the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>2</sup> That dedication did not end with COVID-19; for instance, this week Nigerian health professionals are working around the clock to treat patients with resurgent Lassa fever, despite workforce shortages and tremendous psychological stress.<sup>3</sup>

The Global Health Worker Initiative would be a new and additive account, and it was included in the President's fiscal year 2024 Budget Proposal. It is needed to help ensure countries have the staff necessary for resilient health systems that can maintain services when confronted by catastrophic events, such as disease pandemics, while improving quality, accessibility, and management of health services.

Inadequate health workforces and weak health systems have severely undermined our efforts to respond to global health emergencies, including COVID-19. These challenges are systemic in nature and require a bold response. Dedicated US assistance will provide the funding and, equally important, the leadership required to build capacity to surge the health workforce when emergencies arise, advance the professionalization of community health workers, and increase the reliability and quality of primary health services. Properly designed, this assistance can also address barriers that health workers, 70% of whom are women, face in remuneration and leadership opportunities.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.frontlinehealthworkers.org/sites/default/files/2023-04/FY%2024%20approps%20letter\\_FHWC\\_final\\_0.pdf](https://www.frontlinehealthworkers.org/sites/default/files/2023-04/FY%2024%20approps%20letter_FHWC_final_0.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.ft.com/content/402df6ca-5098-40ca-9cc8-bae331c39398>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.gavi.org/vaccineswork/view-frontline-how-nigeria-handling-resurgent-lassa-fever>

<sup>4</sup> <https://globalhealth.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/GHBB23FrontlineHealthWorkers.pdf>

The COVID-19 pandemic taught us that strong health workforces and resilient health systems are crucial for detecting and responding to an infectious disease outbreak while continuing delivery of essential health services. During emergencies, countries must have trained health workers to detect new pathogens and then respond where needed. Yet, many countries lack adequate planning systems that provide rapid, accurate information on workers' location, capacities, and job performance.<sup>5</sup>

The World Health Organization (WHO) has assessed that “in the majority of Member States, a lack of available health workers is the largest constraint to ensuring the continuity of essential health services during the pandemic, including the delivery of COVID-19 tools (vaccines, diagnostics and therapeutics).”<sup>6</sup> WHO states the human resource challenges have been “caused by a combination of pre-existing [health worker] shortages coupled with unavailability due to COVID-19 infections and deaths, mental health issues and burnout and departures from service due to a lack of decent working conditions.”<sup>7</sup>

Data from WHO shows that the health workforce shortage has worsened in the WHO African Region since 2013 and that at the current rate will not improve by 2030.<sup>8</sup> The number of countries which rank below the global median in terms of their density of doctors, nurses and midwives per capita has grown from 47 to 55 since 2020.<sup>9</sup>

When health systems face chronic health worker shortages, there are life and death consequences for children and families.<sup>10</sup> Global progress in reducing maternal mortality has stalled, which a recent UN report attributed to lack of timely access to high-quality medical care resulting from a lack of available staffing and supervision of health workers.<sup>11</sup> The African region has seen a 400% increase in measles cases as well as a surge in outbreaks of other vaccine-preventable diseases, including polio and yellow fever.<sup>12</sup>

The U.S. now has a critical opportunity to enhance our global health security and pandemic preparedness strategies and programs by strengthening health workforces in partner countries. Tangible US leadership would strongly reinforce regional efforts, such as the African Union's recently launched Health Workforce Task Team.<sup>13</sup>

Any funding for health workforce strengthening should be in addition to current US investments, so that it does not come at the expense of existing humanitarian and international development programs.

We urge you to make this investment of \$200 million in the fiscal year 2024 (FY24) State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs bill to establish the Global Health Worker Initiative now to honor health workers' contributions and strengthen the systems they work in and that communities depend on.

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<sup>5</sup> [https://vitalwave.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/HRH-Assessment\\_Final-Report-2021.pdf](https://vitalwave.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/HRH-Assessment_Final-Report-2021.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> [https://apps.who.int/gb/ebwha/pdf\\_files/WHA75/A75\\_12-en.pdf](https://apps.who.int/gb/ebwha/pdf_files/WHA75/A75_12-en.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> [https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/WHO-2019-nCoV-EHS\\_continuity-survey-2022.1](https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/WHO-2019-nCoV-EHS_continuity-survey-2022.1)

<sup>8</sup> [https://apps.who.int/gb/ebwha/pdf\\_files/WHA75/A75\\_15-en.pdf](https://apps.who.int/gb/ebwha/pdf_files/WHA75/A75_15-en.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> <https://healthpolicy-watch.news/eight-country-healthcare-workers-migration/>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/worldwide-shortage-of-health-workers-threatens-effective-health-coverage-301553411.html>

<sup>11</sup> [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(23\)00385-9/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(23)00385-9/fulltext)

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.afro.who.int/news/vaccine-preventable-disease-outbreaks-rise-africa>

<sup>13</sup> <https://adf-magazine.com/2022/04/african-union-plan-seeks-to-train-thousands-of-new-medical-workers/>