

Frontline Health Workers: Building a Healthier and More Secure World

American leadership has been critical to the inspirational progress in global health in recent decades—including significant reductions in child and maternal mortality, the rate of new HIV infections, and deaths from malaria and tuberculosis. Central to this progress is the U.S. government's work with our partners to train and support frontline health workers—community health workers, midwives, local pharmacists, nurses, and doctors who live and work in the poorest and most underserved regions of the world.

Costing as little as \$300 to train and support a frontline health worker, they provide families with proven, cost-effective, lifesaving care to help prevent and treat infections, increase coverage of vaccines, ensure healthy outcomes for mothers and newborns, prevent unintended pregnancies, and fight diseases. Simply put, without frontline health workers, there would be no health care for millions of children and their families in the developing world.

Tragically, because of the current global health worker shortage, an estimated 1 billion people have little to no access to essential health services. As a result, millions die or are disabled every year.

The United States has tremendous leverage to spur global investment to fill this shortage. Prioritizing the training and support of frontline health workers in U.S. global health programming will not only save lives, it will strengthen our national security, grow our economy, and underscore the values and compassion of the American people.

Investments in Frontline Health Workers Promote National Security and Economic Growth

Healthy populations are more associated with productive, prosperous, and peaceful nations, while countries with poorer health are more associated with instability and conflict, terrorism, and dictatorships.

The 2010 United States National Security Strategy cites the need to strengthen health systems and invest in global health interventions as crucial to counter security threats. Targeted global health investments help open new markets, leverage allied investment, and strengthen national security by stabilizing fragile countries and providing the human capital needed for economic and political stability.

A healthy workforce in developing countries fosters the economic growth that builds the foundation for international business partnerships that benefit both donor and developing nations.



PHOTO CREDIT: Kate Holt, Jhpiego

Developing Country Leadership in Supporting Frontline Health Workers

With assistance from the U.S. and international partners from the public and private sectors, developing country partners around the world are making strong commitments to sustain their health workforces:

- The Ethiopian government since 2003 has invested in training 40,000 frontline health workers. As a result, mortality rates among infants, children, and women have steadily declined. Twice as many children have been immunized, treated for pneumonia, and given vitamin A to prevent blindness.
- After a public-sector hiring freeze was announced in Uganda last year, Ugandan health officials and civil society utilized data from a USAID-funded program tracking its health workforce to successfully advocate for \$19.8 million from the country's Parliament to fill critical health worker posts.
- U.S. investment in Afghanistan has contributed to an almost five-fold increase of skilled midwives, which has led to a gain of more than 10 years in life expectancy for Afghan women.

U.S. Government Leadership to Address the Global Health Workforce Crisis

Recognizing the health workforce crisis is a major barrier to progress in the fight against HIV/AIDS, members of Congress supported the training and retention of 140,000 health workers as a requirement in the Lantos-Hyde Global Leadership Against HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria Act of 2008. Passed with broad bipartisan support, this Act was signed into law by President Bush.

Programs like the Medical Education Partnership Initiative and the Nursing Education Partnership Initiative have been launched by U.S. government agencies to increase the number of nurses and doctors trained at institutions in sub-Saharan Africa. The U.S. Agency for International Development funds training and support for community health workers, midwives, nutrition counselors, and clinical care providers around the world to address maternal, newborn, and childhood mortality.

While the U.S. Government's leadership on health workforce has contributed to significant gains in the number of skilled and supported health workers, there remains a shortage of at least 1 million frontline health workers in the developing world. The U.S. must elevate its support for frontline health workers to accelerate progress on its global health goals, which include ending preventable child deaths and fostering an AIDS-free generation.

The U.S. should:

- Commit to improving the capacity and impact of existing frontline health workers
- Invest to train, equip, and support more frontline health workers
- Articulate its efforts to support frontline health workers in a government-wide, comprehensive health workforce strengthening strategy that includes specific targets for increasing equitable access to health workers in developing countries

About the Frontline Health Workers Coalition

Launched in January 2012, the Frontline Health Workers Coalition (FHWC) is an alliance of more than 25 organizations working together to urge greater and more strategic U.S. investment in frontline health workers in the developing world as a cost-effective way to save lives and foster a healthier, safer, and more prosperous world.

Frontline Health Workers' Role in Addressing Global Health Challenges

- Every day 20,000 children in the developing world die, mostly from illnesses like pneumonia and diarrhea. Low-cost interventions—such as the provision of oral rehydration solution, zinc tablets, and antibiotics—delivered by frontline health workers can help to prevent these deaths.
- Every day 1,000 women die from preventable causes related to pregnancy and childbirth; 99% of all maternal deaths occur in developing countries. Skilled birth attendants can help to reduce maternal mortality by properly managing pregnancy, delivery, and complications.
- Despite progress in fighting infectious diseases like HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, and malaria, millions continue to die every year from these diseases. From providing insecticide-treated bednets for malaria prevention to providing care and support for people living with HIV, frontline health workers provide the interventions that need to be scaled up to curb these global killers.
- The critical need for water, sanitation, and hygiene education, the threat of major disease outbreaks, and the need for preventive measures to stem the burden of non communicable diseases like heart disease and diabetes all require regular availability of skilled, trained, motivated and supported frontline health workers.



PHOTO CREDIT: MSH