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Frontline Health Workers Coalition Comments on Draft Every Newborn Action Plan (ENAP) February 2014

The Frontline Health Workers Coalition (FHWC) – an alliance of 36 United States-based organizations working together to urge greater and more strategic U.S. investment in frontline health workers in developing countries – is very encouraged by the circulating draft of the Every Newborn Action Plan.

We commend the Action Plan's strong acknowledgment of the critical role health workers play in ensuring healthy mothers and babies through the delivery process, in addition to prenatal and postnatal care. We were also very pleased that the indisputable hurdle of health workforce shortages, both overall numbers and distribution, was recognized as a critical barrier to efforts to reduce newborn deaths. To directly address this barrier, the action plan should include a recommendation calling for a global post-2015 action plan on human resources for health. This action plan should be agreed to be developed, approved, and accompanied by strong national HRH strategies that focus on ensuring everyone, including mothers and newborns, has access to a health worker.

Point 57, under strategic objective 3, mentions that "currently less than one in six countries with the highest burden of maternal and newborn mortality reaches the minimum benchmark of 23 doctors, midwives and nurses per 10 000 population that is necessary to provide a basic package of care." This language makes a very strong case for improving the numbers, training, retention and distribution of health workers as part of the Every Newborn Action Plan. However, this point can be made stronger with data from the 2013 WHO/Global Health Workforce Alliance report "No Health Without A Worker." This report indicates that *every country* with a neonatal mortality rate of 30 or more deaths per 1,000 live births (which accounts for over 60% of global neonatal death) lacks the numbers of doctors, nurses and midwives necessary to provide even basic services per WHO's above standard.

We also commend the recommendation to better utilize community health workers – who can access women and children in their communities and homes – to improve maternal and newborn health. Specifically, we support the recommendation to use community health workers "to fulfill multiple tasks, including home visits during pregnancy and after childbirth, facilitation of women's groups, and mobilization of community leaders and structures to act for the health of the newborns."¹ Community health workers can play—and in a rapidly increasing number of high neonatal mortality countries *are* playing— a vital role in preventing newborn deaths and improving quality of care.

Despite the critical role they play, community health workers are not included in current global counts of health workers, nor are they considered part of the formal health system in many countries. For this reason, the Frontline Health Workers Coalition recommends that community health worker numbers be included in national-level health workforce data collection and that the action plan include a call for community health workers to be integrated into national health systems in every country.



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The Every Newborn Action Plan includes an indicator on community health workers: “Number of community health workers providing new born care in population/ All births in population.” The Frontline Health Workers Coalition supports the inclusion of this indicator, but notes that for it to be achieved; countries would need to collect data on community health workers under a common framework. For this reason, the Coalition urges the inclusion of a recommendation to include community and other frontline health worker counts and mapping as part of health workforce data collection.

The Frontline Health Workers Coalition applauds the strong language included in the Every Newborn Action Plan on the need for better trained, supported and distributed health workers. The Coalition also recommends that language be added on the need for better counting and support for community and other frontline health workers providing services on the frontlines of care.

¹ Every Newborn Action Plan, proposed action point 82.