



best investment for a **healthier world**™

**Frontline Health Workers Coalition Position on Draft Post-2015 (Sustainable Development Goals) Framework  
August 2013**

**Overview: Health Workers' Role in Achieving MDGs 4, 5 and 6**

**Over this last decade, we have seen unprecedented attention to health—with significant increases in both funding and political attention, especially in response to HIV/AIDS and malaria. And we have the seen the results of this increased focus.** In the last decade, malaria death rates have fallen by 32% globally and the global rate of new HIV infections has fallen 25%. In 1990, 33,000 children under age 5 died of preventable diseases every single day. Today, that figure has come down to 19,000, and progress in the last decade has been twice as fast as in the decade before. (WHO, UNAIDS)

**Health workers, especially frontline health workers, have been essential to this impressive progress on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) for health.** For example, they have counseled families to use bed nets to prevent malaria; diagnosed and treated pneumonia; provided oral rehydration solutions or zinc to treat diarrhea; organized vaccination days in communities to protect children against measles; prevented and treated HIV including ensuring access to lifesaving antiretroviral therapy; counseled new mothers about breastfeeding; and provided prenatal care. (FHC POLICY BRIEF)

**At the same time, a shortage of health workers continues to be one of the barriers to achieving the current MDGs for health.** For example, each year 48 million women give birth without the support of a skilled birth attendant, and 2.4 million of those women give birth utterly alone, leaving them and their children susceptible to obstetric and neonatal complications. More than 800,000 newborns die during childbirth, with more than 3 million dying before they are 1 month old. The majority of these lives could be saved by skilled birth attendants. ([Save the Children](#))

**A critical barrier to achieving the MDGs has been inequity.** Vulnerable populations, urban poor and those living in rural and underserved areas especially continue to suffer from preventable diseases because they lack of access to basic health and health education services. **Frontline health workers provide health care in many of the hardest to reach areas, often traveling on foot with just a backpack of supplies, providing needed prevention, treatment and health education services to communities.**

**Health Workers in the Post-2015 Framework**

The United Nations process for determining the post-2015 framework (the Sustainable Development Goals, or SDGs) is underway. Recommendations from UN advisory panels have shown a continued commitment to improving health. They have focused on: (1) continuing progress on MDG priority health issues, with ambitious goals that might include ending preventable maternal and child mortality; (2) expanding health priorities to include non-communicable diseases, sexual and reproductive health, and other conditions; and (3) strengthening health systems to provide comprehensive primary care, possibly



best investment for a **healthier world**™

in the context of universal health coverage (UHC). The proposed framework will emphasize *equity* and *sustainability*.

**None of these priorities will be possible without addressing shortfalls in human resources for health (HRH), especially on the frontlines of care.** Each proposed target involves expanding health services, which means more, better supported and skilled health workers will be needed. Because frontline health workers are often the only point of contact with the health system for many people who live in underserved and hard to reach areas, maximizing their reach, the quality of care they provide and the strength of the referral system is critical. Ambitious targets, whether they emphasize health outcomes or health coverage, will require a commitment to HRH, specifically training, retaining, managing and supporting health workers.

**HRH is critical to equitable, sustainable improvements in health, but it requires focused investments.** Millions more lives could have been saved if the MDGs had addressed frontline health worker shortages; the SDGs must establish clear expectations and accountability for closing this gap.

#### Frontline Health Workers Coalition Recommendations for Post-2015 Goals

- **FHWC urges UN member states to ensure that the post-2015 health framework**—whether it is organized according to specific health sector goals such as ending preventable child deaths or a cross-cutting goal such as universal health coverage—**include a sub-goal or target on health workers.**
- **The post-2015 health framework should include specific indicators for health workers,** such as ratio of health workers per 10,000 population; percentage of births attended by skilled health personnel; percentage of first-referral health facilities that are adequately staffed; and percentage of infants ages 12-23 months who received three doses of diphtheria, pertussis and tetanus vaccine. Results should be disaggregated by wealth quintile and urbanicity to promote equity.
- **To narrow health equity gaps within populations, the framework should not only include a specific target and indicators on health workers, but also a strategic focus on frontline health workers, particularly community health workers.** To improve health and health care access among the worst-off, it will be important to track access to trained, equipped health workers within their communities with an emphasis on access among the poorest of the poor.