

MATERNAL AND CHILD HEALTH (MCH)

What You Should Know

Critical U.S. investments have improved maternal and child health. Children, newborns, and mothers have a greater chance of surviving today than they did just two decades ago, thanks in large part to strong investment in the Maternal and Child Health (MCH) program of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). The number of preventable child and maternal deaths has been halved since 1990.

Mothers and babies continue to die from preventable causes. An estimated 300,000 mothers and 5.2 million children younger than five continue to die from preventable causes annually. Almost half of child deaths occur within the first month of life, with 1 million babies dying on the day of their birth.¹

Pregnancy and childbirth complications are the leading cause of death for adolescent girls globally.²

USAID improves accessibility to high-quality care for mothers and children. USAID's scale-up of basic interventions are lifesaving in countries where the burden of preventable maternal and child deaths is highest. These interventions include increasing access to skilled birth attendants; training and supporting health workers; preventing and treating life-threatening childhood illnesses like pneumonia, diarrhea, and severe acute malnutrition; and improving access to water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) in healthcare facilities.

Congressional Calls to Action

Increase funding for USAID's maternal and child health account.

This account supports evidence-based interventions for children younger than 5 and pregnant women to ensure they survive and thrive. Additional investments could scale-up MCH interventions, strengthen health systems, and deliver childhood immunizations, including through direct support to Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, and polio vaccination campaigns. Additional investments, particularly in immunizations, will allow USAID to commit to making up for disruptions to these essential services during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Expand investment for the CDC's Global Immunization work.

Immunizations are among the most cost-effective ways to improve health and, by extension, strengthen global health security. Childhood vaccinations prevent an estimated 4 million deaths worldwide every year.³ Additional investments are needed to make up for backsliding as new data shows global vaccination coverage continued to decline in 2021, with 25 million infants missing out on lifesaving vaccines.

Advance policies that expand access to evidence-based interventions for preventing child and maternal deaths and reject any attempts to restrict access to lifesaving services.

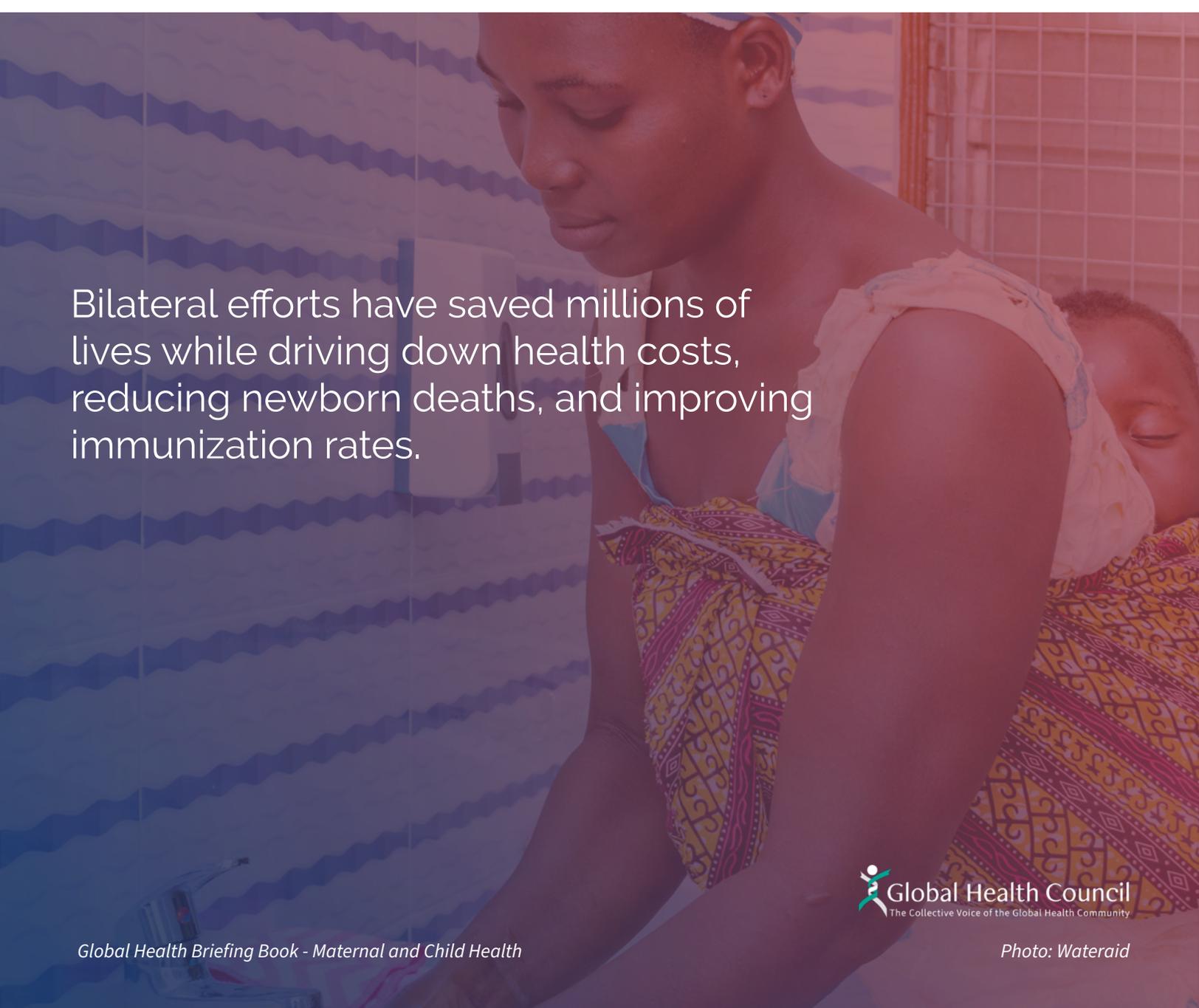
These policies include ensuring adequate skilled care during the prenatal period, childbirth, and postpartum; expanding access to family planning and contraception; and providing care for all small and sick newborns.

Why is this investment important?

Preventing child and maternal deaths is one of three priority global health investments for the U.S. government. These investments have proven to be among the best buys for the United States, supporting the health, wellbeing, and economic security of an entire generation of women and children. The total number of child deaths declined from 12.6 million in 1990 to 5 million in 2020, showing the real possibility of ending preventable maternal and child deaths.

The United States invests its resources bilaterally through the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and multilaterally through Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, and UNICEF. These collective efforts

have saved millions of lives while driving down health costs, reducing newborn deaths, and improving immunization rates. USAID focuses its programming in countries where the burden of maternal and child deaths is the highest. In the past 10 years, USAID has helped save the lives of more than 9.3 million children and 340,000 women.⁴ USAID outlines a roadmap for success in its Acting on the Call initiative, which supports the scale-up of high-impact interventions to fight the leading causes of death for women and children, including access to high-quality antenatal, labor, delivery, and postpartum care and saving newborns from severe infections.

A photograph of a woman in a patterned wrap holding a baby in a hospital setting. The image is overlaid with a semi-transparent blue and purple gradient. The woman is looking down at the baby, and the background shows a hospital room with a window and a bed.

Bilateral efforts have saved millions of lives while driving down health costs, reducing newborn deaths, and improving immunization rates.

Resources

Acting on the Call: Preventing Child and Maternal Deaths 2021 (USAID): https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/USAID_2021_AOTC_v10_508_1.pdf

Children: Improving Survival and Well-being. World Health Organization (WHO): <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/children-reducing-mortality>

Maternal Mortality (WHO): <https://www.who.int/en/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/maternal-mortality>

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Citations

1. World Health Organization (WHO). “Children: improving survival and well-being.” September 2020. <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/children-reducing-mortality>
2. Mayor, Susan. Pregnancy and childbirth are leading causes of death in teenage girls in developing countries. *British Medical Journal (BMJ)*, 2004 May 15; 328(7449): 1152. doi: 10.1136/bmj.328.7449.1152-a
3. U.S. Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). “Why CDC Is Involved in Global Immunization.” <https://www.cdc.gov/globalhealth/immunization/why/index.html#:~:text=Childhood%20vaccinations%20prevent%20an%20estimated,killer%20and%20global%20health%20threat>
4. U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). “Acting on the Call: Preventing Child and Maternal Deaths: A focus on Sustaining Lifesaving Health Services Amidst the COVID-19 Pandemic.” November 2021. https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/USAID_2021_AOTC_v10_508_1.pdf