

NUTRITION

What You Should Know

Malnutrition is a leading cause of child death and disability. Roughly 3 million children die annually because they are malnourished (one child every 11 seconds).¹ Those who survive severe malnutrition in early childhood are more likely to suffer permanent physical and mental stunting that impairs their health, educational attainment, and earning potential.²

Malnutrition is preventable. Scientists have identified a suite of clear, proven, and affordable nutrition interventions that are ready to be scaled today.³ Models show that even if only a percentage of those in need received these interventions, millions of children's lives could be saved over the next five years.⁴

Nutrition interventions are a “best buy” in global development, yet are severely underfunded. Leading economists consistently rank nutrition interventions among the most cost-effective ways to save and improve lives around the world, with an extremely high return on investment: every \$1 invested in nutrition yields up to \$35 in economic returns.⁵ U.S. nutrition funding is not commensurate with the severity or scale of the problem. Every year, malnutrition kills more children under 5 than AIDS, malaria, COVID-19, and tuberculosis combined, yet the nutrition account received under 2 percent of U.S. global health funding in fiscal year 2022.⁶

Congressional Calls to Action

Increase funding for high-impact nutrition interventions.

Increased funding for Interventions like the Power 4, especially through the Nutrition sub-account within the Global Health Programs account at the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), will help build the nutrition resiliency that communities need to withstand ongoing global shocks, like pandemics, climate emergencies, and conflict, that increase rates of malnutrition.⁷

Use global moments like Nutrition for Growth to make bold, high-profile commitments to nutrition that inspire similar commitments from other actors.

Spearhead or join calls for U.S. leadership and ensure funding is available to maintain the U.S. government's position as a leading nutrition donor and leverage more financial and political support for nutrition from multilaterals, other governments, and the private sector. Ensure all existing U.S. government commitments to nutrition are allocated and disbursed.

Prioritize women and children in the critical 1,000-day window in Congressional responses to ongoing global food insecurity crises.

Congress should prioritize nutrition security in policies and funding required to address global food insecurity. Children must have the nutrients, not just the calories, they need to grow and develop to their full potential.⁸

Why is this investment important?

Good nutrition can cost-effectively build resilience to future pandemics and other global shocks. Malnourished individuals are more likely to contract and die from infectious diseases, allowing these diseases to spread more easily.⁹ Good nutrition provides the building blocks for long-term immunity and is key to improving global health security. Nutrition investments will also help prevent some of the worst impacts of extreme weather, which is diminishing crop yields and nutritional quality.¹⁰

The benefits of improved nutrition extend beyond global health, with a significant impact on women and girls. Nutrition interventions are under-leveraged in the fight for women's rights.¹¹ Well-nourished women and girls are healthier, more productive, more likely

to finish school, be economically independent, and have healthy babies. Investing in nutrition could also help grow the economies of low- and middle-income countries, increasing country ownership and opening new markets for American businesses.¹²

By prioritizing nutrition investments, the U.S. could lead the next frontier of the child survival revolution and make bold strides toward ending preventable maternal deaths. The U.S. already saves and improves countless lives by fighting severe malnutrition through high-quality, evidence-based nutrition programs, but millions of women and children are still waiting for this essential care.¹³

A photograph showing two women in a kitchen setting. They are both focused on preparing food. One woman is holding a vegetable, and the other is using a knife. There is a large white colander filled with green beans on the counter in front of them. The background shows a simple kitchen environment with a wooden wall and some hanging items.

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Resources

2021 Global Nutrition Report: <https://globalnutritionreport.org/reports/2021-global-nutrition-report/>

Nourish the Future Five-Year Proposal (End Malnutrition): <https://www.endmalnutrition.org>

Maternal and Child Nutrition Series (The Lancet, June 2013): <https://www.thelancet.com/series/maternal-and-child-nutrition>

Severe Malnutrition Learning Hub (1,000 Days): <https://thousanddays.org/resource/severe-malnutrition-resource-hub/>

Contributors

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