



# Women's and Children's Health



To improve the health and security of all U.S. citizens—and to ensure sustainable thriving of the world population—the United States must maintain its leadership in global health through forward-looking policies, a long-term vision, and continued investment. Where should U.S. investments and attention be focused? The report *Global Health and the Future Role of the United States* highlights four priority global health challenges and identifies four opportunities to do business differently.

## Why is Women's and Children's Health a Priority?

Benefits of investing in women and children go beyond health and translate into increased economic prosperity, stronger societal bonds, and improved community resilience, adding up to a cost-effective, high-impact investment opportunity for the United States.

For instance, *with just a 10 percent increase in the number of girls attending school, a country's GDP rises by an average of 3 percent.*

### Yet:

- Despite advancements, each year more than **300,000 mothers** die, and nearly **6 million children** die before their 5th birthday.
- Almost **one-third of global maternal deaths** now result from causes not directly related to pregnancy, including HIV/AIDS, malaria, heart disease, diabetes, and obesity.
- Quality of life also matters. In low- and middle-income countries, **250 million children** won't reach their developmental potential due to extreme poverty and stunting.

## What's the Big Picture?

Although continued investment in efforts to improve survival is critical, it is only part of the challenge. The consequences of poor nutrition, lack of nurturing care, and lack of immunization can follow a child through life. Saving lives is critical, but simply keeping children from dying is not enough. As child mortality declines, the investment focus should shift to thriving: maximizing the cognitive, language, and emotional development of children. Building empowering, nurturing, and cognitively enriching environments for vulnerable children under 5 and their mothers requires incorporating the health, education, and social services sectors.

## CASE STUDY FROM THE REPORT



### NURTURING CARE IMPROVES HEALTH AND PRODUCTIVITY IN JAMAICA

With partial support from the United States, community health workers in Jamaica conducted home visits every week over a 2-year period—teaching parenting skills and cognitive and socioemotional skills—and provided formula containing more than half of daily recommended calories, protein, and micronutrients.

After 20 years, participants in this program earned 25 percent more than nonparticipating peers. This kind of simple psychosocial intervention can have a positive economic effect and compensate for developmental delays.

## RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

### **SURVIVE: Improve Survival in Women and Children**

**Why?** Current mortality rates for both mothers and children under age 5 are still unacceptably high. In 2015, 216 mothers died for every 100,000 births. That same year, 41 children died before the age of 5 for every 1,000 live births.

**How?** Congress should increase funding for USAID toward ending preventable maternal and child mortality. These investments should include focus on immunization, integrated management of child illness, nutrition, prenatal care and safe delivery, and access to contraceptives and family planning.

### **THRIVE: Ensure Healthy and Productive Lives for Women and Children**

**Why?** Early investments in child cognitive and language development have significant long-term effects, which translate to lifelong benefits for job market participation, lifetime earnings, productivity, health, and economic growth.

**How?** USAID, PEPFAR, their partners, and other funders should integrate proven, cost-effective interventions into their programs for supporting healthy child development. These should include nutrition assistance, reduction of childhood exposure to violence, management of maternal mental health issues, and early education and cognitive stimulation.

## OTHER BRIEFS IN THIS SERIES

*The report highlights four priority global health challenges and four key opportunities to do business differently.*

### PRIORITIZING GLOBAL HEALTH CHALLENGES



Global Health  
Security



HIV/AIDS,  
Tuberculosis,  
and Malaria



Cardiovascular Health and  
Cancer Prevention

### DOING BUSINESS DIFFERENTLY



Medical Product  
Development



Digital Health  
Technology



Financing



Global Health  
Leadership

### **SPOTLIGHT ON: Women and Children's Health and Financing**

The Global Financing Facility (GFF) was launched in 2015 to address the \$33.3 billion funding gap for reproductive, maternal, newborn, child, and adolescent health in high-burden LMICs. Twenty to 40 percent of health expenditures are lost due to inefficiency, and modeling suggests that the combination of economic growth, tax base increases, and increased prioritization of health would close 71 percent of the \$33 billion gap in funding.

To read the full report and other related resources, including all of the briefs in this series, please visit [nationalacademies.org/USGlobalHealth](https://nationalacademies.org/USGlobalHealth).