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Saving lives – Australia's aid to women and children



Australia, through the aid program, invests in the health and wellbeing of women and children because good health is a fundamental human right. Investing in women's and children's health saves lives, increases the ability of women and families to work and earn money, allows children to go to school and contributes to a better quality of life. Poor health traps women and their families in a cycle of poverty which is why Australian aid helps developing countries to provide life-saving health care to women and children throughout Asia, the Pacific and some countries in Africa. Women, adolescent girls and children are supported throughout the cycle of pregnancy and birth, infancy, childhood, adolescence and adulthood.

BABIES

Globally, 3.1 million newborns die each year and 2.6 million babies are stillborn. To give babies the best chance of survival it is critical to keep mothers healthy during their pregnancy, ensure skilled health workers attend births, promote exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months and provide extra care for small babies. Australia invests in a range of interventions that promote child survival. For example, in Timor-Leste, Australia is working with the Ministry of Health and partners to improve health and reduce deaths through mobile outreach services. These services provide women living in rural communities with access to family planning information, ante-natal care, immunisation for their children and other basic health advice. In Papua New Guinea, Australia is supporting exclusive breastfeeding promotion as well as testing and treatment for HIV-positive mothers to prevent transmission to their babies.

PREGNANT WOMEN

Every year around 287,000 women and girls die globally from largely preventable complications related to pregnancy and childbirth. Women are great advocates for children and can generate demand for improved health services to better look after their families. However, in most countries, women often lack access to quality health care and can be prevented from making decisions about the timing, number and spacing of their children or whether they deliver their babies in hospital. Australia provides support for women to access quality health services with a particular focus on increasing access to skilled birth attendants. For example, in Papua New Guinea, Australia is supporting the training of up to 500 new midwives by 2015 through in-country scholarships.

CHILDREN

Every year, over six million children die before their fifth birthday. Many of these deaths are preventable. Millions more children are physically or mentally unwell, struggling to get enough to eat or sick from contaminated water, poor sanitation or disease. As well as providing access to health services, Australia concentrates on preventing common childhood diseases such as diarrhoea and pneumonia. Australia is a strong supporter of the GAVI Alliance—a public/private partnership which aims to expand global access to life-saving vaccines. Australia also provides bilateral support for immunisation programs in Papua New Guinea, preventing children from getting diseases such as measles, whooping cough and tetanus.

ADOLESCENTS

Women and girls in developing countries are more likely to become mothers at a young age. Pregnancy during adolescence has serious health impacts for girls and their babies—complications from pregnancy and childbirth are the leading cause of death among girls aged 15–19 years in many developing countries. Australia has committed to helping four million children go to school by 2016, recognising that an educated mother is likely to have fewer and healthier children, and her children are more likely to survive those first five critical years and go to school. In addition to education, Australia is promoting healthy lifestyles for adolescents. In the Pacific, Australia is preventing non-communicable diseases through health education. Australia is also supporting adolescent girls in developing countries to receive the human papilloma virus (HPV) vaccine to prevent cervical cancer, including in Lao PDR and Fiji.

WOMEN

Approximately one in three women will experience gender-based violence in her lifetime. In some Pacific countries, more than 60 per cent of women and girls have experienced violence at the hands of their partners. Australia continues to increase its support for preventing the incidence of, and responding to, violence against women, including through preventative programs and improved health services and counselling. Australia's ten-year *Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development* initiative will improve opportunities for political, economic and social advancement of Pacific women, and address the underlying causes of violence against women. Women also face barriers in accessing health services, including family planning. Approximately 222 million women in developing countries do not have the means to determine the size of their family or the spacing of their children. In response, Australia supports leading international institutions, including the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF) and Marie Stopes International, to deliver comprehensive family planning education and services in Asia and beyond.

HEALTH SYSTEMS

It takes a strong health system to consistently deliver quality health services, save lives and keep women and children well.

Australia aims to support health services which have high quality medicines and staff available, are delivered in appropriate clinics and hospitals and are available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

Australia is also building the international evidence base by funding innovative research on issues such as disease prevention and control, health systems and health financing. This research provides evidence on which to base our investment decisions, and helps governments and policy makers understand what works and why.

Australia supports women and children throughout the life cycle

How do we do it?

Australia provides support for:

- > global programs and organisations that deliver essential health services and promote women's and children's health
- > bilateral and regional programs to strengthen the health systems of priority countries, particularly in Asia and the Pacific—a region which bears around 40 per cent of the global burden of maternal and child mortality
- > targeted programs on nutrition, family planning, immunisation and health education delivered by civil society organisations
- > research into maternal and child health to build the international evidence base
- > scholarships and training to build capacity in developing countries.

To deliver our support, Australia works closely with partner governments, civil society, research institutes, development partners, donors, philanthropic organisations, global partnerships and multilateral organisations including United Nations partners.

Australia's focus countries — maternal and child health

