FOREIGN ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS

Vision

All infants, children, and adolescents have the right to high-quality services that save lives and promote healthy development, regardless of where they were born. Because diseases cross borders, global health protects children in the United States as well as those who live in other countries. Departments across the federal government contribute to global health, including United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the nation’s lead development agency; the Department of State, which oversees the country’s health diplomacy and its fight against HIV/AIDS; and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), which contributes public health capabilities including surveillance, technical support, and rapid response to epidemics.

The U.S. government spends about one percent of its budget on foreign assistance—far less than the roughly 25 percent imagined by respondents in a recent national poll, and far less than is needed. About one-third of that one percent goes to global health. The next administration should support sustainable programs that deliver impact and strengthen systems, in partnership with local pediatric health associations and other stakeholders. Such programs deliver impact and strengthen systems, in partnership with national health worker associations and other stakeholders.

Recommended Administrative Actions

End preventable deaths. USAID has created an unprecedented strategy for helping to end preventable child and maternal deaths by 2035, entitled “Acting on the Call,” which must be maintained and codified by a new administration. Hard-won reforms must be maintained, including the identification of a coordinator and deputy coordinator for child and maternal survival; identification and coordination of relevant budget lines; innovative financing mechanisms; partnerships with target country stakeholders; and country-specific reporting.

Address non-communicable diseases. The next administration must correct USAID’s historical neglect of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) and address chronic health conditions that impact existing health priorities, particularly with interventions including nutrition, injury prevention, and tobacco and second-hand smoke prevention. NCDs are non-infectious diseases that cannot be spread person-to-person, such as cancer, cardiovascular disease, diabetes, mental disorders, and chronic respiratory diseases. They affect millions of children and adolescents and can impact their lifelong health and productivity.

Support child development. USAID’s programs must ensure that every child and adolescent has support for and access to the conditions for healthy and safe development, including early education, and protection from violence and exploitation. Implementation would require collaboration across USAID’s functional bureaus, with an expanded role and dedicated funding for the U.S. Government Special Advisor for Children in Adversity. A new Global Ambassador for Children’s Issues at the Department of State would ensure high-level diplomatic representation and oversee interagency coordination.

Continue to protect mothers and children in the fight against HIV/AIDS. The U.S. President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), the federal government’s largest global health platform, is realigning its programs within partner countries to focus on geographic areas with the highest HIV burden. Many of the U.S. government’s maternal and child health (MCH) programs rely on PEPFAR’s infrastructure, and may be forced to cut services or close. The next administration must provide a report on how the realignment being overseen by the State Department’s Office of the U.S. Global AIDS Coordinator will impact existing projects targeting the MCH population, and take steps to ensure continued service delivery.

Protect children in conflict settings. One billion children experience violence every year, of whom millions live without protective family care, including children who are trafficked or enlisted in armed groups. While agencies across the federal government have taken steps to address this challenge, notably under the Assistance for Orphans and Other Vulnerable Children in Developing Countries Act of 2005, they lack necessary coordination, authorities, and funding. The next administration must develop an interagency strategy coordinated by the Department of State to protect children in conflicts and disasters, including both children who are internally displaced and those who are refugees.

Recognize health literacy as essential to adolescent empowerment. Domestic and global health programs are rarely designed to meet the needs of adolescents, despite the fact that most of the behaviors that underlie chronic illnesses begin during adolescence, nearly half of adolescent women’s pregnancies are unintended, and adolescents make up more than 15 percent of the world’s population. Fortunately, the new Global Strategy to Empower Adolescent Girls provides a platform that can help address this challenge. The next administration must supplement this strategy with an implementation plan to promote adolescent health literacy, which would provide youth with information and tools to make healthy choices.
Support global immunization programs. The world is close to polio eradication, with polio remaining endemic in only two countries: Afghanistan and Pakistan. The CDC must fully implement a polio endgame strategy and update the Global Immunization funding stream to reflect the transition to polio legacy and routine immunization activities, consistent with the Global Polio Eradication Initiative’s Polio Eradication and Endgame Strategic Plan. Failure to do so would jeopardize the substantial gains the CDC has made in helping to build the global infrastructure to fight infectious diseases. Polio funding comprises nearly 80 percent of the CDC’s Global Immunization budget and contributes to many of the assets countries rely upon to build functioning immunization systems.

Recommended Congressional Actions

Pass the REACH Act. Congress must pass the Reach Every Mother and Child Act (H.R. 3706/S. 1911 in the 114th Congress) to codify USAID’s Acting on the Call blueprint to end preventable maternal and child deaths within a generation.

Address non-communicable diseases. Congress must pass legislation authorizing USAID to address chronic health conditions, including injury and violence.

Support child development. If USAID fails to support the development of children and adolescents, Congress must require the agency to do so by statute, with a new authorization to coordinate early child development activities across the agency’s bureaus.

Address MCH gaps in PEPFAR realignment. If the Administration fails to take quick action to close potential maternal and child gaps within the PEPFAR program, Congress must require the State Department to do so in statute.

Protect children in conflict settings. Congress must authorize a new, fully funded strategy to replace the U.S. Government Action Plan on Children in Adversity, which was established by the Assistance for Orphans and Other Vulnerable Children in Developing Countries Act of 2005 and sunsets in 2017. While lacking sufficient resources and authorities, the Action Plan provided the first whole-of-government guidance for investing in early childhood development and protection and ultimately aligned activities across 11 federal departments and agencies.

Support global immunization efforts. Congress must provide authorization for the CDC’s prevention of vaccine-preventable chronic illnesses, along with new statutory authority for the CDC to address tobacco control, secondhand smoke prevention, and other NCD risk factors internationally.

Funding Priorities

Maternal and child health at USAID. The MCH account funds advances to health care systems and supports life-saving interventions, such as training skilled birth attendants to ensure labor and delivery are safe for mothers and newborns. It also includes funding for the Global Polio Eradication Initiative, which aims to deliver a polio-free world, and Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, which procures vaccines for low-income countries.

Nutrition at USAID. This account improves the nutritional status of children, adolescents and women who are pregnant or recently gave birth, including by supporting counseling on optimal breastfeeding.

Family planning/reproductive health at USAID. USAID’s contributions to family planning and reproductive health not only save the lives of women and children, but also help to ensure that adolescent girls can stay in school longer, save more money, and contribute more to their economies.

Migration and refugee assistance at the Department of State. The Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration provides humanitarian assistance during emergencies for vulnerable populations, including children.

Global immunization at the CDC. CDC’s Center for Global Immunization provides technical assistance and surveillance support to country ministries of health, with a focus on eradicating polio, reducing measles deaths, and strengthening routine vaccine delivery.

About this Document

This document is an excerpt from Blueprint for Children: How the Next President Can Build a Foundation for a Healthy Future (http://aap.org/blueprint), which was produced by the American Academy of Pediatrics in September 2016 and has also been endorsed by the following organizations: the Academic Pediatric Association, the American Pediatric Society, America’s Promise Alliance, the Association of Medical School Pediatric Department Chairs, Family Voices, the National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners, the Pediatric Policy Council, the Society for Adolescent Health and Medicine, the Society for Pediatric Research and ZERO TO THREE.