



**USAID**  
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

## ISSUE BRIEF

### USAID's Family Planning Services

USAID has long been a leader in the effort to improve health by providing modern methods of voluntary family planning to hundreds of millions of couples annually. Because USAID's programs maximize access to quality family planning and reproductive health care, more couples and individuals in the developing world have been able to determine the spacing of their children and family size. Voluntary family planning has profound health, economic, and social benefits for families and communities by:

- Protecting the health of women by reducing high-risk pregnancies
- Protecting the health of children by allowing sufficient time between pregnancies
- Fighting HIV/AIDS through providing information, counseling, and access to male and female condoms
- Reducing abortions
- Supporting women's rights and opportunities for education, employment, and full participation in society
- Protecting the environment by stabilizing population growth

USAID missions in more than 50 countries serve as the point of direct contact, while the Washington, D.C. technical staff work with U.S. and host-country partners to design programs centered on clients' needs and expressed desires. All initiatives are cost-effective; promote quality, voluntarism, and informed choice; maximize access; and achieve a sustainable public health impact.

#### USAID Priority Areas

**Increase women's and couples' access to services.** Approximately 123 million women of childbearing age who want to limit or space their births are not accessing family planning services.<sup>(1)</sup> To increase access to and quality of reproductive health care, USAID's programs train health care professionals and ensure adequate physical facilities, commodities, and equipment while integrating family planning with other health care programs.

**Increase contraceptive security.** Contraceptive security exists when every person is able to choose, obtain, and use quality contraceptives and condoms for family planning and for HIV/AIDS prevention. USAID strives to ensure clients have long-term access to a range of high-quality contraceptives, condoms, and other essential health supplies in several ways. We invest resources to improve distribution and availability, to promote quality in product, and to support commodities distribution across all sectors – public, private, and non-governmental – in the countries where we work.

**Help fight the AIDS epidemic.** Incorporating education and counseling to promote condom use and other HIV/AIDS prevention messages in family planning programs, especially in countries with medium or high HIV/AIDS prevalence, can help stop the spread of the epidemic. Currently, USAID works to reduce the incidence of sexually transmitted infections (STIs), promotes private sector condom marketing, and supports intensive communication campaigns to promote safer sexual behaviors. USAID research also shows that adding family planning to programs for the prevention of mother-to-child HIV transmission can greatly reduce the number of orphans while saving the lives of thousands of women and children at less cost than antiretroviral drug treatment programs alone.

**Reinvigorate family planning in Sub-Saharan Africa.** USAID raises awareness of clients, providers, governments, and donors to the need for family planning as a critical health and development intervention in the nations of Sub-Saharan Africa, while continuously identifying ways to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of programs in a region with high birth rates and high unmet need.

**Maximize access and quality of care (MAQ).** MAQ identifies and addresses barriers to client access and works to improve family planning service delivery standards and quality. Additional assistance is essential in such areas as provider training, service management and supervision, client education, and increasing the choice of available contraceptive methods.

**Provide special programs for youth.** The world has nearly two billion 10-to 24-year-olds; of these, 86 percent live in developing countries (2). Today's youth constitute the largest cohort ever to enter the transition into adulthood. Consequently, as this current generation of young people moves into its childbearing years, it will have more women of reproductive age than any other time in history. (3) Too many young people lack basic information about reproductive and sexual health and are not being adequately served by existing programs. USAID is working to meet the challenge of establishing patterns of informed and responsible reproductive decision-making early in life. Delaying sexual activity and first pregnancy and increasing responsible practices, including abstinence and condom use, will not only protect young people's health and quality of life, but will also contribute to the health and prosperity of the world's future population.

**Strengthen postabortion care.** Each year in the developing world, an estimated 67,000 women or approximately 13 percent of all women die due to complications of unsafe abortion. Millions more suffer serious illness and infertility. To address these severe health problems and to reduce maternal death, USAID funds postabortion care (PAC) programs that comprehensively address women's needs through three core components:

- Emergency treatment for complications of spontaneous or induced abortion
- Family planning counseling and services, and depending on disease prevalence and available resources, STI evaluation and treatment, and HIV counseling and/or referral for testing
- Community empowerment through community awareness and mobilization

### **Program Assistance Is Offered in Many Areas**

USAID-funded programs have **trained more than half a million medical professionals**, including clinic supervisors and administrators, physicians, other health professionals, and community-based workers in quality family planning and reproductive health care practices. Training comes in many forms, including classroom-based learning, distance learning, self-directed learning, technology-assisted learning and on-the-job training. It covers a broad range of content areas including management, quality assurance, logistics, community education, client-provider interaction, and clinical skills. This alone has helped increase access to and improve the quality of both family planning services and client education, especially for people living in hard-to-reach rural communities.

USAID **developed a global system for the delivery of contraceptives.** Many countries and donors rely on the Agency's contraceptive supply forecasting system, which ensures contraceptive security – the availability of contraceptive products in a variety of choices, year-round.

USAID **helps developing-country professionals collect and use data** from Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) and other surveillance instruments to plan and evaluate their programs and to develop and implement policies that improve access and quality of family planning. DHS include statistics on maternal health and mortality, fertility, contraceptive use, HIV/AIDS, child health, and safe motherhood.

USAID **pioneered contraceptive social marketing programs** and supports innovative mass media and public information campaigns that educate consumers about issues ranging from family planning and contraception to HIV/AIDS prevention.

USAID research has **advanced the development of new and improved contraceptives** including pills, intrauterine devices, and female-controlled barrier methods that can protect against STIs. USAID also uses research to improve understanding of client needs in order to advance the quality of services.

In addition, USAID addresses **poverty and health equity** issues by exploring the linkages and improving access to family planning and reproductive health programs in developing countries. USAID's family planning programs promote **gender equity** by providing guidance in areas of research, training, communications, and service delivery. USAID works to encourage **private sector participation** in the commodities market. Programs also work to **abandon female genital cutting, prevent and repair fistula**, and address the **reproductive health concerns and needs of displaced populations**. A final priority is to identify the synergistic relationship between **population, health, and the environment**.

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1) Unmet Need for Contraception in the 21st Century – Population Resource Center. 2) The World's Youth 2006 Data Sheet, Population Reference Bureau, Washington, D.C. 3) Why Invest in Children and Youth. The World Bank (<http://go.worldbank.org/EF310LWYJ0>)