

## Working with Countries to Improve Maternal and Newborn Health



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Since 1990, global maternal mortality has been reduced by more than a third, with some countries showing that much can be accomplished through political will and strategic interventions. But still, every day, approximately 1,000 women die from pregnancy complications and childbirth, most of them in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia.<sup>1</sup> For every woman who dies, around 20 more are seriously injured or suffer disabilities. And every day, about 10,000 newborns die within their first 28 days of life.<sup>2</sup>

Most of these deaths can be prevented. Millennium Development Goals 4 and 5 (MDGs 4 and 5) call for a reduction in child mortality and improvements in maternal health, respectively. They are the goals at highest risk of not being met based on current performance. An accelerated, orchestrated effort is needed if the world is to achieve these goals by the 2015 deadline.

# H4+

## What is Health 4+?

With five years to go until 2015, UNFPA, UNICEF, WHO, and the World Bank, as well as UNAIDS, have joined forces as Health 4+ (H4+) to support countries with the highest rates of maternal and newborn mortality, and accelerate progress in saving the lives and improving the health of women and their newborns.

## What does H4+ do?

H4+ works with countries to strengthen their health systems to provide better maternal and newborn health services in order to reduce the maternal mortality ratio by 75 percent and achieve universal access to reproductive health – the two targets under MDG 5.

This joint effort will also help to reduce child mortality as called for by MDG 4, because of the links between a mother's health and the survival, health and well-being of her children, particularly newborns.

H4+ works with governments, national partners, and other multilateral agencies. The collaboration focuses on 60 high-burden countries.

H4+ is advocating for a stronger focus on maternal and newborn health and is supporting the UN Secretary-General's Global Strategy for Women's and Children's Health. H4+ is highly engaged in ensuring the involvement of countries targeted in the strategy and in supporting them to fulfil their commitments.

## How does H4+ work?

Building on collective strengths and each agency's respective country-specific advantages and capacities, this coordinated and harmonized support will help to accelerate progress towards achieving MDGs 4 and 5 and leverage positive developments in countries that are not on track.

H4+ partners are working with governments and civil society to enhance national capacity to:

- Conduct needs assessments and ensure that health plans are MDGs-driven and performance-based;
- Cost national maternal, newborn, and child health plans;
- Mobilize required resources;
- Scale up quality health services to ensure universal access to reproductive health, especially for family planning, skilled attendance at delivery, and emergency obstetric and newborn care, ensuring linkages with HIV prevention and treatment;
- Address the urgent need for skilled health workers, particularly midwives;
- Address financial barriers to access, especially for the poorest;

- Promote innovations in service delivery;
- Tackle the causes of maternal and newborn mortality and morbidity, including gender inequality, adolescent pregnancy, low access to education, inadequate knowledge and inappropriate health practices and care-seeking, discriminatory values and attitudes, harmful social norms especially for girls, such as female genital mutilation and child marriage; and
- Strengthen monitoring and evaluation systems for maternal and newborn health.

Together with government officials, the UN country teams, donor partners, and other stakeholders, H4+ is developing comprehensive government-led work plans to support maternal and newborn health and survival. These work plans have clear benchmarks and address community participation and communications activities.

The agencies involved will work and coordinate with existing global, regional, and national initiatives.

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<sup>1</sup> Trends in Maternal Mortality: 1990-2008, Estimates developed by UNFPA, UNICEF, WHO, and the World Bank, September 2010.

<sup>2</sup> The State of the World's Children 2009: Maternal and Newborn Health, UNICEF, December 2008.



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