

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

April 27, 2021

The Honorable Barbara Lee
Chairwoman
Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations,
and Related Programs
Committee on Appropriations
HT-2, the Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Hal Rogers
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations,
and Related Programs
Committee on Appropriations
2406 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairs Lee and DeLauro and Ranking Members Rogers and Granger:

As you begin consideration of the Department of State and Foreign Operations Appropriations Bill for fiscal year (FY) 2022, we strongly urge you to allocate robust funding for the Maternal and Child Health (MCH) account, including Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, and the Nutrition account. This funding is critical to preserving effective, evidence-based, poverty-focused assistance that saves lives and helps strengthen economies in developing countries.

U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) MCH and Nutrition programs form the backbone of the U.S. commitment to help end preventable child and maternal deaths globally. While reductions in global mortality rates for women and children are two of the biggest success stories in international development, there remain significant gaps in maternal and child survival as well as outstanding opportunities for U.S. investment to intervene early for improved child development and life-long health. The impacts of COVID-19 are exacerbating these gaps and disproportionately impacting the world's most vulnerable – primarily women and children – and undermining decades of progress.

In 2019, 5.2 million children under the age of five died from mainly preventable and treatable diseases. A significant proportion of under-five deaths occur in the first 28 days after birth; newborns account for nearly 50 percent of all under-five deaths. In the past, deaths from illnesses such as malaria and HIV have dropped significantly, but progress in preventing deaths from pneumonia and diarrhea has been much slower, especially in sub-Saharan Africa. While there are vaccines to prevent the deadliest cases, pneumonia and diarrheal diseases are still leading killers for children under five. Finally, recent estimates suggest that nearly 300,000 women continue to die annually of preventable causes related to pregnancy and childbirth, almost all in low-resource settings.

These numbers do not account for impacts due to COVID-19, which is disrupting already stretched essential health care services worldwide, including prenatal and maternity care and regular check-ups for young children to ensure proper nutrition and immunization. These disruptions are projected to cause significant increases to child and maternal mortality. 2020 estimates indicated that even a 10 percent decline in essential pregnancy-related and newborn care in low- and middle-income countries would result in 28,000 additional maternal deaths and 168,000 additional newborn deaths.

To continue progress and address persistent challenges, MCH programs support the delivery of low-cost, proven, life-saving services in 25 priority countries where the burden of preventable deaths is the highest. USAID's generous investments help provide access to skilled birth attendants and emergency obstetric care; training for frontline health workers; support for training caregivers to provide age-appropriate mental stimulation and nurturing care; clean water, sanitation, and hygiene; life-saving health commodities; and research and development of innovative tools.

A critical portion of the MCH account supports Gavi, which provides new and under-used vaccines to developing countries. This public-private partnership has enabled the immunization of more than 822 million children since 2000, preventing more than 14 million deaths. Unfortunately, according to data collected by the WHO, UNICEF, and Gavi, at least 80 million children under the age of one were likely affected by the cancellation or interruption of immunization services. Continued U.S. support of this partnership is critical to help save up to 8 million more lives, particularly in the wake of COVID-19. Gavi will be essential not only in maintaining and restoring routine immunizations, but in ensuring the equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines. As Gavi bolsters efforts to continue routine immunization and deliver COVID-19 vaccines to lower-income countries, USAID's technical support is essential to support these efforts and enable more equitable access to vaccines.

The Nutrition account supports nutrition-specific programs for women and children, focusing on the first 1,000 days between pregnancy and a child's second birthday. Absent quality nutrition and early intervention health and development services, a child's physical and cognitive development is at risk of being stunted. As a result, almost a quarter of the world's children never reach their full earning, social, and economic potential. In addition, hunger and malnutrition are projected to rise due to COVID-19. Projections for 2020 suggested that the number of children under five who are wasted may increase by 7 million, putting children at increased risk of death. U.S. leadership in support of nutrition is particularly critical this year to bolster global commitments to scale up this important intervention, including at the 2021 Nutrition for Growth Summit.

Again, we urge you to allocate robust funding for MCH and Nutrition programs in FY22, along with continued support for other programs that contribute to the health and well-being of families

and communities in developing countries. We look forward to working with you to ensure that the United States maintains its leadership in this global effort.

Sincerely,



SARA JACOBS
Member of Congress



BRIAN FITZPATRICK
Member of Congress



BETTY MCCOLLUM
Member of Congress



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Member of Congress

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Abigail D. Spanberger
Member of Congress

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Alan Lowenthal
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