

# Global Nutrition

In 2023 alone, U.S. supported programs reached **38 million children and 11 million pregnant women** with essential nutrition health services.

Good nutrition—especially during the first 1,000 days, from pregnancy through a child's second birthday—lays the foundation for lifelong health, learning, and economic opportunity. Yet millions of women and children do not receive the nutrition they need during this critical window.

Poor nutrition during the first 1,000 days can lead to lifelong consequences: higher risk of illness, delayed learning, lower earnings, and premature death. These outcomes are devastating, but also largely preventable.

## What is Nutrition in the First 1,000 Days?

The first 1,000 days spans pregnancy, breastfeeding, and a child's first two years of life. During this time, the brain and body grow faster than at any other point in life.

When these basics are in place, children are far more likely to survive and thrive:

- Pregnant women get enough nutritious food, vitamins, and minerals
- Babies are exclusively breastfed for the first six months, when possible
- Young children receive safe, diverse, and nutrient-rich foods starting at six months, alongside continued breastfeeding

## How Big is the Challenge?

Undernutrition is an underlying cause of nearly half of all deaths among children under five worldwide. For those who survive, the damage often lasts a lifetime. Once a child passes their second birthday, many of the harms of early undernutrition cannot be fully reversed.

In 2024, alone

- 42.8 million children were wasted (the technical term for dangerously thin)
- 150.2 million children were stunted (the term for when children are too short for their age due to chronic malnutrition)

About half of the global burden of stunting in early childhood originated during pregnancy and the first 6 months of age. This is because millions of women enter pregnancy already malnourished, which increases the risk for themselves and their babies during this period when they are entirely dependent on maternal nutrition.

The burden is not evenly shared. Children in low- and middle-income countries face far higher risks of undernutrition due to limited access to nutritious food, health services, clean water, and social protection.

## Nutrition as a U.S. Global Health Priority

For decades, the U.S. has been a global health leader in addressing malnutrition through foreign assistance. But in 2025, most U.S. global nutrition programs were halted. While some critical activities were started up again, the funding remains significantly below previous levels.

The [2025 America First Global Health Strategy](#) left out nutrition and comprehensive maternal and child health programs. Although the strategy emphasizes priorities like health workforce and strengthening supply chains, dedicated continued nutrition funding is essential to maintain gains.

To implement this strategy, the U.S. is negotiating new bilateral health agreements with partner countries. The structure of these agreements will determine whether nutrition programs continue, whether funding is sustained, and whether recent progress against malnutrition is protected or reversed.

## What Can Congress Do?

Congress has played a critical bipartisan role in elevating nutrition as a global health priority. In 2022, the Global Malnutrition Prevention and Treatment Act (GMPTA) became law, directing the U.S. Agency for International Development to combat malnutrition through proven, evidence-based interventions (like prenatal vitamins and breastfeeding support) and transparent reporting.

With strong bipartisan support, U.S. global nutrition programs have delivered lifesaving results. In 2023 alone, U.S. government supported programs reached 28 million children and 11 million pregnant women with quality nutrition services.

Moving forward, Congress should:

- Sustain and increase funding for evidence-based, cost-effective nutrition interventions and ensure nutrition is fully integrated into new bilateral health agreements
- Leverage partnerships that are ready to scale now, including pooled procurement mechanisms and catalytic funding sources like the Child Nutrition Fund (CNF)

The CNF [unlocks](#) hundreds of millions of additional dollars for proven nutrition programs. Through its catalytic match window, every \$1 from a donor like the U.S. mobilizes \$3 more—\$1 each from partner governments, UNICEF, and a private foundation.