

# Maternal and newborn health

Every day, more than 700 women and 6,300 newborns die from preventable complications related to pregnancy and childbirth, most of them in low- and middle-income countries.

In May 2024, global health leaders adopted a landmark World Health Assembly resolution to accelerate progress towards reducing maternal, newborn and child mortality to reach Sustainable Development Goal 3. The UN's Every Woman Every Newborn Everywhere (EWENE) initiative guides progress towards that goal, setting bold targets to ensure every woman and every newborn have access to appropriate care during and after pregnancy in a fully functional health facility.

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While earlier progress for mothers and newborns focused on expanding coverage of services, the challenge now is quality: more women and newborns die from poor-quality care than from the inability to receive care. The next decade of progress on maternal and newborn mortality will be driven by improving access to quality services, including high quality health products. Essential maternal and newborn health products – like lifesaving medicines, diagnostics and medical devices – are often unavailable or unaffordable, especially in low- and middle-income countries where fragmented markets and systemic barriers limit access.

Ensuring consistent access to quality maternal and newborn health products, however, is not easy. Access is challenged by limited domestic resources and inconsistent financing; by confusion regarding the quality of products, and a proliferation of substandard and falsified medicines; and by fragmented procurement processes and weak distribution systems. As countries continue the path towards decentralization, the processes for ensuring access to critical tools become even harder.

## How we work

At Unitaid, we save lives by making critical health products available and affordable for people in low- and middle-income countries. We identify innovative treatments and tools, help tackle the market barriers that are holding them back, and get them to the people who need them most – fast.

We work with country governments, regional bodies, technical organizations and civil society to improve the systems that enable consistent access to high quality maternal and newborn health products. By understanding government procurement systems and supporting regional regulatory mechanisms, we can improve the availability of these commodities.

By addressing the risk of HIV, syphilis, hepatitis B and Chagas disease transmission in pregnancy, and supporting governments to enact appropriate policies and programs, we can protect both mothers and newborns.

Through **product-focused** actions, we can increase the availability of blood-loss measurement drapes that can accurately identify life-threatening bleeding after childbirth, and new heat-stable drugs that can prevent it. We also invest in clinical research aimed at simplifying and expanding the use of existing medicines.

We support **delivery-focused** approaches to understand how devices and digital tools to monitor blood pressure can reduce preeclampsia, and how products that treat maternal anemia can be consistently administered through an improved antenatal care platform.

And we support **system-focused** interventions such as regional manufacturing and regional regulatory mechanisms like the African Medicines Agency to accelerate the process of making products available in country.

**Photo:** Although skilled support during childbirth is the goal, women who live in remote villages cannot always reach a hospital in time. Though Barki gave birth at home, she took misoprostol to prevent postpartum hemorrhage. Unitaid is working with Jhpiego and local partners to advance tools to make childbirth safer everywhere. © Unitaid.



## We get health products to women, when and where they need them.

We are developing a portfolio of maternal and newborn health investments aimed at increasing access to products to diagnose, monitor and treat specific pregnancy-related conditions and supporting the systems that enable women and newborns to receive quality care. These include:

### Postpartum hemorrhage



Postpartum hemorrhage is the leading cause of maternal mortality. Our investments advance a package of tools for preventing, identifying and treating severe bleeding, by expanding the clinical uses of heat-stable carbetocin (HSC), demonstrating the efficacy of intramuscular tranexamic acid (TXA), and developing models of care that increase access to blood loss measurement drapes, and misoprostol, HSC and TXA, as part of a bundle of interventions to treat hemorrhage.

### Preeclampsia



Preeclampsia is the second leading cause of maternal death globally. Unitaid investments will aim to open markets and reduce prices for novel preeclampsia biomarker tests, expand access to blood pressure measurement devices and increase the availability of drugs such as low-dose aspirin, low-dose calcium, magnesium sulphate and antihypertensives that are safe in pregnancy.

### Anemia



Anemia affects 37% of pregnant women worldwide, putting them at higher risk of other life-threatening complications during pregnancy and childbirth. Through our investments, we will support access to better diagnosis of anemia in pregnancy and increased availability of nutritional supplements and intravenous iron preparations.

### Elimination of vertical transmission



Eliminating vertical (mother-to-child) transmission of HIV, syphilis, hepatitis B and Chagas disease requires better antenatal and postnatal care to increase access to diagnostics, prevention and treatment. Our investments will develop access models to allow babies to be born free from these diseases.

**Photo:**

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/ Jhpiego

**Looking ahead**

Now and in the future, Unitaid will work closely with national and regional bodies to test and improve innovative financing mechanisms to increase the buying power of domestic resources, support national and regional regulatory processes to expedite access to quality products, improve price transparency and procurement processes to facilitate purchasing and enhance the knowledge and competence of procurement officers to ensure good and effective decision making.

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**We work with country governments, regional bodies, technical organizations and civil society to improve the systems that enable consistent access to high quality maternal and newborn health products.**

**About Unitaid:**

We save lives by making health products available and affordable for people in low- and middle-income countries. We work with partners to identify innovative treatments, tests and tools, help tackle the market barriers that are holding them back, and get them to the people who need them most – fast. Since we were created in 2006, we have unlocked access to more than 100 groundbreaking health products to help address the world’s biggest health challenges, including HIV, TB, and malaria; women’s and children’s health; and pandemic prevention, preparedness and response. Every year, more than 300 million people benefit from the products we’ve helped roll out.