



## ISSUE BRIEF

# Healthy Moms, Healthy Societies

Every 90 seconds, a woman dies from a pregnancy-related complication. Maternal death or injury can result from uncontrolled bleeding, infection, seizures, hypertensive disorders, birth obstruction or other complications. Most of these factors are preventable and, ultimately, they are closely linked to the low social status of women in poor countries. In addition, lack of access to resources, underlying social and gender norms, and disrespect and discrimination within the healthcare system limit a woman's ability to access reproductive health services and information. Inadequate health systems cannot provide the high-quality, lifesaving care women need for safe, healthy childbirth.

CARE is at the forefront of a movement to safeguard women's health during pregnancy and childbirth. Along with partners across the globe, we are sharing the resources and knowledge that allow families to grow and thrive. CARE believes that access to sexual, reproductive, and maternal healthcare is both a fundamental human right and a critical development concern that is deeply rooted in gender equality.

### ISSUE IN FOCUS

**Despite the recent decline in maternal and child deaths in developing countries, mortality for women and children remains unnecessarily high. Family planning has been shown to contribute to reductions in deaths among women and children, yet more than 220 million women who would like to delay, space, or prevent pregnancy lack access to modern contraceptive methods.**

When a mother dies, her family breaks down. Her children are less likely to go to school, eat well, and get immunized against diseases, and are up to 10 times more likely to die before their second birthday. When a mother becomes disabled due to complications from pregnancy and childbirth, she is less likely to earn an income, participate in her community and raise healthy children. **Healthy mothers create healthy societies.**

Increased availability, quality, and access to voluntary family planning and maternal and child health services would not only save lives and improve the health of women and children, but would also have a positive impact on the overall health and development of families, communities, and countries.

In 2014 alone, CARE reached 37.5 million women, men, and children with maternal health services and information including access to emergency obstetric care, skilled care at birth, postpartum care, and voluntary family planning. CARE's programs offer women and men contraceptives tools including oral contraceptives, IUDs, condoms and awareness building on natural family planning, as well as educational services to support safe usage of these methods.

## Increasing Access to Voluntary Family Planning

Today, more than 220 million women in developing countries who don't want to get pregnant lack access to the necessary contraceptives, information, and services to avoid pregnancy. This is a life-threatening crisis – complications in pregnancy and childbirth are one of the leading causes of death for women in the developing world, and many of these deaths occur among girls 19 or under. The majority of these deaths are preventable.

We know that when women are able to decide when they will have children, and how many children they want to have, both mothers and children are much more likely to survive and to thrive.

Family planning could prevent up to 30 percent of maternal deaths that occur every year, by enabling women to delay their first pregnancy and space later pregnancies at safe intervals. Globally, if all women who wanted to use contraception were able to do so, it is estimated that 70,000 maternal deaths could be prevented each year. It is estimated that if all children were born three years apart, the lives of 1.6 million children under the age of five would be saved each year.

Universal access to reproductive health care and family planning is not only a powerful means to dramatically improve maternal and child health, but is also a low cost, essential component of sustainable development and poverty alleviation.



## Support Comprehensive Women's Health Programs

CARE advocates for the U.S. to support policies and allocate robust resources to increase the quality, availability, and access to voluntary family planning services to promote healthy timing and spacing of pregnancies as part of a comprehensive approach to maternal and child health. Family planning represents one of the most effective interventions to reduce maternal and child deaths, and is a critical component in the continuum of services needed to improve the health of mothers and children. CARE knows that U.S. policies and resources should eliminate barriers to accessing health services so that all women and their families, including the most vulnerable, can attain the services and information they need.

In addition to strong support for U.S. investments in international family planning, CARE is also seeking to build bipartisan support for authorizing legislation that would help to reduce maternal and newborn deaths by improving and better coordinating a wide variety of interventions, including healthy timing and spacing of pregnancies.

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