

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

World's Leading Health Experts Gather to Develop Country-Specific Action Plans to Prioritize Community Health and Save Lives

Increasing Access to Effective, Community-based Health Interventions Can Save the Lives of 2.4 Million Women and Children

JOHANNESBURG, 27 March 2017 – Representatives from 45 countries, including 23 official country delegations, gathered today for the Institutionalizing Community Health Conference in Johannesburg, South Africa. The audience included nearly 400 government officials and health experts. This conference will focus on helping country delegations develop country-specific action plans and learning agendas that address priority issues and challenges to strengthen partnerships with communities as resources.

“This conference provides an important opportunity for countries to share their experiences and strengthen the role of communities as part of the health system,” said Ms. Barbara Hughes, Director of Office of Maternal, Child Health and Nutrition, USAID. “Community involvement is critical in ensuring that more women and children have information about and access to life-saving primary health services.”

Conference participants will seek to identify solutions to bottlenecks hindering efforts to end preventable child and maternal mortality and galvanize the global community to action. Increasing access to effective, community based health interventions can end [2.4 million](#) preventable child and maternal deaths every year.

“Communities must be at the heart of our efforts to build stronger, more effective health systems that keep children alive and healthy,” said Stefan Peterson, Associate Director, Health Section, UNICEF. “All too often, communities have been thought of as passive beneficiaries of health programming. In fact, they have enormous potential to promote and advance health, both within communities and for nations as a whole.”

This conference will identify opportunities and challenges – financial and human resources, programmatic, socio-political – for institutionalizing viable and resilient platforms for community health investments.

“This conference provides a forum to share and debate both the progress and challenges in community health,” said Ms. Anita Gibson, Deputy Director, USAID’s flagship Maternal and Child Survival Program. “It also provides an opportunity to forge and strengthen new and existing partnerships among multiple stakeholders including communities, governments, private sector, civil society and development partners.”

According to the World Health Organization (WHO) projections, by 2030 we will face a shortage of [18 million](#) health workers, particularly in low-income countries. This scarcity threatens the potential for achieving the SDGs.

“The UN Secretary General has asked that the ‘Transform’ component of the new Global Strategy for Women’s, Children’s, and Adolescents’ Health should focus on community empowerment,” said Dr. Anthony Costello, Director of Department of Maternal, Newborn, Child and Adolescent Health, WHO. “Communities must be given the power to co-produce a healthy environment, healthy behaviours and to hold health workers accountable for good quality services.”

The conference is co-hosted by the U. S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) in collaboration with the World Health Organization (WHO), the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and USAID’s flagship Maternal and Child Survival Program (MCSP).

Select sessions of the conference can be watched via webcast at www.ichc2017.org.

MCSP:

Charlene Reynolds
Tel: + 1 202 412 3550
email: charlene.reynolds@mcsprogram.org

Tala Haikal
Tel: + 917 975 6385
email: tala.haikal@mcsprogram.org