



## Healthy Moms, Healthy Societies

Every 90 seconds, a woman dies from a pregnancy-related complication. Maternal death or injury can result from a number of factors; however, they are often linked to the low social status of women. But here's the good news: these deaths are almost entirely preventable.

Among the most effective, affordable and life-changing interventions is the ability for women to time and space their pregnancies when it's best suited for them. We know this simple tool – called family planning – gives women and families access to information and contraception, so they can voluntarily decide if, when and how many children to have. By enabling women to have this decision-making power over their futures, we could save millions of lives each year.

CARE is at the forefront of a movement to safeguard women's health during pregnancy and childbirth by providing necessary health care services and options for delaying, spacing or preventing pregnancies. These essential interventions not only save lives and improve the health of women and children – they also have a positive impact on the general health and development of families, communities and countries and create a ripple effect of economic security that impacts the entire world. CARE believes access to maternal health and family planning is both a fundamental human right and a critical development concern that is deeply rooted in gender equality.

### The Problem

Despite the decline in maternal and child deaths over the past several decades, mortality for women and children in the developing world still remains tragically high. Access to voluntary family planning for women in the developing world is a matter of life or death. Today, hundreds of millions of women who want to delay or prevent a pregnancy lack the access, information and services they need and deserve. Women at high risk for maternal health complications cannot always survive pregnancies that they cannot prevent.

When a mother dies, her family breaks down. Her children are less likely to go to school, eat well, 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. **CARE knows: healthy mothers create healthy societies.**



Unfortunately, there has been inadequate investment and limited political will from the U.S. Government in family planning services that would reduce maternal, neonatal and child mortality worldwide. The considerable progress made in addressing other health issues – such as HIV/ AIDS, malaria and child survival – highlight the potential impact U.S. investments can have in saving lives. There is no health issue more important than another. Death from AIDS, malaria or child birth are all tragic and worth U.S. attention and assistance. While the past decades have seen increased political will, attention and resources to maternal health, there is still much to be done.

Increased availability, quality and access to maternal health and family planning 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.

### **The Solution:**

When women can decide to delay, space and time their pregnancies, mothers and children are more likely to survive and thrive. **In fact, access to family planning services could prevent up to 30 percent of maternal deaths per year.**

Many simple tools and services that we take for granted in the United States often mean the difference between life and death for mothers and children in the developing world. We must provide all the “tools in the toolbox” needed to end preventable maternal and child deaths, and use the tools most suited to

meet the challenges women face. Helping women plan and space their births is one of the most effective ways to prevent maternal and child deaths.

In addition, family planning is a powerful, low-cost and essential component of sustainable development and poverty alleviation. Access to family planning could provide hundreds of millions of women the option and ability to get an education, invest resources into other children, improve family economic security and to live life to its fullest potential.

By equipping women and couples with the power to decide whether and when to have children, family planning significantly reduces maternal and child mortality, and improves the health of the whole family. Research shows that children born less than two years after the previous birth are about 2.5 times more likely to die before age five than children who are spaced farther apart.

### **Next Steps:**

**CARE advocates for the U.S. Government to support policies and allocate robust resources to increase the quality, access and availability of voluntary family planning as part of women’s essential health care services.**

**CARE advocates for the U.S. Government to support robust funding for international family planning, including funding for the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and oppose any cuts to these lifesaving programs.**