NUTRITION

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW

Nutrition lays the foundation for human health and development.
Good nutrition is particularly important to the growth and development
of infants and young children during the critical 1,000-day window
between a woman’s pregnancy and her child’s second birthday.

Malnutrition is a widespread and urgent problem.
Malnutrition is the underlying cause of almost half of all child deaths each year. Nearly one
in four children worldwide are living with the consequences of chronic
childhood malnutrition (stunting), while 51 million children suffer from
acute malnutrition (wasting). Increasingly, countries are burdened by
undernutrition and obesity at the same time. Progress has been made,
but some efforts are still off track. If the United States is serious about
ending the need for foreign assistance, progress on maternal and child
nutrition must be accelerated.

Malnutrition especially impacts the health and potential of women
and girls. One in three women suffers from anemia, a micronutrient
deficiency that effectively undercuts investments made in her health,
education, and economic empowerment. Hemorrhage, a condition
exacerbated by anemia, remains the leading cause of maternal
mortality, accounting for 27% of maternal deaths.1

Proven, costed interventions exist that demonstrably save lives.
Research shows that scaling up high-impact, high-priority nutrition
interventions2 during the 1,000-day window can protect children from
both nutritional and developmental risks. Leading scientists, health
experts, and economists agree that improving nutrition during this
critical window is one of the best and most cost-effective investments
we can make to achieve lasting progress in global health and
development.

Global nutrition efforts are aligning with national ownership.
Under the Scaling Up Nutrition Movement, 60 countries are working
to end malnutrition in all its forms by building political ownership
and developing costed nutrition plans. The World Bank and African
Development Bank have also called on finance ministers in high-burden
developing countries to reduce stunting by investing in nutrition.

Nearly one in four children suffer from physical and cognitive
stunting caused by chronic undernutrition. Yet a growing body of
scientific evidence indicates that children who are well nourished early
in life have healthier brain development, stronger immune systems,
fewer chronic diseases, and higher IQs.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CONGRESS

Make nutrition a key U.S. global development priority.
In order to unlock the transformative power of nutrition in saving
lives and promoting growth, Congress must reaffirm and grow
its commitment to global health through a scaled-up approach
to nutrition programs. In doing so, Congress will elevate the
vital role of nutrition in achieving long-term global health
and development goals. Expanded leadership and deeper
engagement in the support of global nutrition efforts, from both
Congress and the administration, are essential to accelerate
progress, to galvanize action, to leverage investments from
other donors and governments, and to reach globally agreed-upon
health targets.

Increase funding to scale up proven nutrition interventions.
Congress has provided modest but steady increases in
nutrition program funding3 over the past several years, in
large part due to the compelling new evidence supporting the
most cost-effective, high-impact interventions. Congress also
supported the development of the U.S. Agency for International
Development (USAID) Multi-Sectoral Nutrition Strategy and
the U.S. Government Global Nutrition Coordination Plan,
then additionally called for the U.S. Government Global Food
Security Strategy to prioritize improved nutrition. Congress
must provide sufficient resources to fully operationalize these
strategies, along with the U.S. roadmap to reduce preventable
child and maternal deaths. Because malnutrition requires a
multisectoral response, the U.S. government also needs to
ensure robust nutrition-related investments are made in other
development sectors. Continuing the current level of funding
will not allow these efforts to fully deliver on their promise.
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WHY THIS INVESTMENT IS IMPORTANT

Nutrition lays the foundation for human health and development. Good nutrition is particularly important to the growth and development of infants and young children during the critical 1,000-day window. Leading scientists, health experts, and economists agree that improving nutrition during this window is one of the best and most cost-effective investments that can be made to help achieve lasting progress in global health and development. Children who are well nourished early in life have shown healthier brain development, stronger immune systems, fewer chronic diseases, and higher IQs.

Without specifically addressing malnutrition — the underlying cause of so many health, development, and economic challenges — the United States will not reach the development gains it hopes to achieve. The United States must maximize the return on its investment in development assistance and, among the 17 potential development investments, nutrition interventions consistently generate some of the highest returns.¹

The benefits of improved nutrition reach far beyond global health. For that reason, prioritizing nutrition programming and increasing related resources can have a multiplier effect. Without due consideration for women's nutritional health, investments to promote their overall health and economic well-being will not yield the maximum returns possible. Investments in child health and well-being are the cornerstone for productive adulthoods, robust communities, and well-functioning societies. Integrating nutrition with the agenda to improve children's lives is not only key to their survival, but a holistic approach to helping the next generation reach its full potential.

A 2016 World Bank report found that the current level of global funding for nutrition is vastly insufficient to meet the four global nutrition targets.² The study found that, over a period of 10 years, an additional $70 billion in nutrition-specific financing would be needed, for a total of $109 billion. Such an investment would yield tremendous returns: 3.7 million child lives saved, at least 65 million fewer stunted children, 860,000 fewer child deaths from wasting, 265 million fewer women suffering from anemia, and 105 million more children exclusively breastfed as compared to a 2015 baseline.³

While this level of investment is ambitious, it is not unprecedented. A subset of high-impact, high-priority interventions have been identified that would serve as a “down payments” toward reaching targets. For example, breastfeeding is both an investment in saving children's lives — more than 800,000 each year — and in improving their health and well-being. It is also an investment in human capital that can benefit a country's economy.⁴ Every $1 invested in breastfeeding generates an estimated $35 in economic returns. Suboptimal breastfeeding is associated with economic losses of more than $300 billion annually.⁵

High-level U.S. government investment in nutrition upholds America's legacy of leadership, vision, and goodwill, unlocking additional resources from other donors and country governments, alike, and improving overall health and well-being on a global scale.

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CITATIONS
2. This subset of interventions for urgent scale-up includes the following: vitamin A supplementation for children; promotion of good nutrition and hygiene practices for infants and young children; antenatal micronutrient supplementation; intermittent preventive treatment of malaria for pregnant women; iron and folic acid supplements for adolescent girls; staple food fortification; pro-breastfeeding social policies and national breastfeeding promotion campaigns; and treatment of severe or acute malnutrition.
3. While the Global Health Programs - USAID (GHP-USAID) account is not the only source of funding for U.S. global nutrition programs, it supports vital services such as providing nutrition education to improve maternal diets, enhancing nutrition during pregnancy, promoting exclusive breastfeeding, and improving feeding practices for infants and young children. Resources from GHP-USAID, Global Health Programs - State, Food for Peace (FFP), Development Assistance (DA), and the Economic Support Fund (ESF) also support the promotion of diet quality and diversification (fortified staple foods, specialized food products, community gardens), along with the delivery of nutrition services such as micronutrient supplementation and community management of acute malnutrition.