



PRESS RELEASE

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AFGHANISTAN'S MATERNAL MORTALITY RATE ADDRESSED AT NATIONAL HEALTH CONFERENCE

KABUL, AFGHANISTAN – Amid new indications that the rate of maternal mortality has worsened in the country, officials from Afghanistan's Ministry of Public Health, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), international health organizations, and other government agencies met at the National Maternal and Newborn Health Conference last week to address the issues and help save the lives of Afghan women and children.

Over the two-day event, the conference's participants worked to develop a strategy that includes an agreed timeline for key short term (6-12 months) and long term (1-5 years) priorities to address the leading causes of maternal mortality and newborn health issues, along with public and private sector implementation approaches and program accountability mechanisms at the provincial and community levels that are responsive to the high burden of maternal and newborn deaths.

Newly released data from the 2015 Afghanistan Demographic and Health Survey show that the maternal mortality ratio appears to have worsened while important indicators for contraceptive prevalence and skilled birth attendance have stagnated. The survey also revealed high levels of gender-based violence. The 2015 Call to Action (the Kabul Declaration) mobilized partners and increased awareness for actions to enhance health system responsiveness to the maternal, newborn, child and adolescent health needs of the country. As a result, this year, there was a need to draft a clear national roadmap to ensure sustainable achievements in maternal and newborn health prevails in the light of recent evidence.

"The release of the AfDHS survey revealed the stark reality of what is facing Afghanistan in terms of maternal health and their health of their children," said USAID Mission Director Herbie Smith. "We are committed to improving the lives of mothers and children in Afghanistan and will work with the government and other entities to ensure that our objectives from this conference are met."

"A national consensus, as well as, specific province-level action plans, are essential to address these urgent needs that will be implemented with transparency and mutual accountability by all partners and stakeholders," said Afghanistan Minister of Public Health Dr. Ferozuddin Feroz.

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With almost \$17 billion spent on development programs in Afghanistan since 2002, USAID provides the largest bilateral civilian assistance program to Afghanistan. USAID partners with the government and people of Afghanistan to ensure economic growth led by the country's private sector, to establish a democratic and capable state governed by the rule of law, and to provide basic health and education services for all Afghans.

The American people, through the U.S. Agency for International Development, have provided economic and humanitarian assistance worldwide for more than 50 years."



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