COVID-19 AND WOMEN’S, CHILDREN’S AND ADOLESCENTS’ HEALTH

The vision of Partnership for Maternal, Newborn & Child Health (PMNCH) is a world in which every woman, child and adolescent is able to realize their right to health and well-being, leaving no one behind. The COVID-19 pandemic has laid bare the structural barriers inside and outside of the health system that disadvantage women, children and adolescents, particularly those most marginalized. In response to the pandemic and the needs of partners, PMNCH has issued a seven-point Call to Action, calling on governments to strengthen political commitment, financing and policies to protect and promote the health and rights of women, children and adolescents and to strengthen health systems during the COVID-19 response and recovery phases.

The Call to Action focuses on seven advocacy “asks” relating to the COVID-19 response and recovery phases: (1) protect access to sexual, reproductive, maternal, newborn, child and adolescent health (SRMNCAH) services and supplies; (2) advance sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) and gender equality; (3) improve quality of care and community engagement; (4) increase recruitment and improve conditions for front-line health workers; (5) ensure social protection for marginalized and vulnerable groups; (6) improve access to clean water, sanitation and hygiene; and (7) prevent violence against women, children and adolescents.

What needs to be done?

The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed the need for strategic and effective advocacy to protect progress already made for women, children and adolescents, and to address inequities embedded in all areas of our societies and economies. The COVID-19 Call to Action, launched in July 2020, sets the direction for PMNCH’s advocacy efforts. A two-year campaign has been launched to drive the COVID-19 Call to Action through high-level political engagement and the mobilization of communities, constituencies and the media. This campaign unites, amplifies and builds on the advocacy work of individual organizations: PMNCH partners at country and regional levels will agree on locally relevant advocacy targets, opportunities and leadership to obtain concrete government commitments.

Progress resulting from the Call to Action will contribute to the intended outcomes of the PMNCH 2021–2025 Strategy, and indicators measuring progress will be developed in line with the Strategy’s Results Framework.

How is PMNCH making a difference?

PMNCH is committed to using the power of its partnership to ensure a sustained and equitable focus on its three priority areas: (1) maternal, newborn and child health; (2) sexual and reproductive health and rights and (3) adolescent health and well-being, with a focus on the poorest and most marginalized communities. These efforts are underpinned by PMNCH’s functions – campaigns and outreach, partner engagement and knowledge synthesis and dissemination – in line with the 2021–2025 Strategy. Much of our work across these areas relates to COVID-19.

Highlights of PMNCH’s deliverables for 2021

Campaigns and outreach

PMNCH is working with national governments and foundations to support the aggregation and amplification of financial and policy commitments to its COVID-19 Call to Action by facilitating, coordinating and supporting PMNCH members to advocate jointly at global, regional and country levels.

Efforts are shaped around four main campaign strategies: high-level champion engagement, community mobilization, constituency mobilization and media advocacy, including:

- organizing a series of “Lives in the Balance” e-summits to raise visibility of the urgent needs of women, children and adolescents during the COVID-19 pandemic, and to enable coordinated action by all partners to meet those needs, contributing to wider economic and social recovery and resilience;
• mobilizing high-level champions, leaders, politicians and decision-makers to advocate for greater investment and supportive policies to advance the COVID-19 Call to Action campaign (e.g. PMNCH Board Chair Helen Clark provided opening remarks during the Generation Equality Mexico Forum, emphasizing the critical importance of advancing gender equality in the context of the pandemic, including by closing the gender gap in political leadership);
• champion advocacy through direct outreach and media engagement, aimed at mobilizing government commitments for fully financed national health plans to provide equitable access to SRMCAH services; and
• strengthening media capacity to report on women’s, children’s and adolescents’ health, including through national workshops, partnership generation and content creation.

Partner engagement
In 2020, PMNCH played an instrumental role in aggregating and amplifying US$ 20.6 billion in financial commitments for maternal, newborn and child health, SRHR and adolescent health and well-being, aligned with its COVID-19 Call to Action. In 2021, PMNCH supported the operationalization of commitments and the tracking of progress through the efforts of its 1000-member network, bringing together civil society, private business, United Nations agencies, health professional organizations, youth groups, donors and others to advance collective advocacy and accountability at the country level.

The mobilization of commitments towards the COVID-19 Call to Action is creating an environment that enables multisectoral action by uniting, amplifying and building on the advocacy and accountability work of individual organizations at the global, regional and country levels, delivering coordinated support to strengthen investment in the health of women, children and adolescents.

Knowledge synthesis
PMNCH is generating and synthesizing knowledge in support of the COVID-19 Call to Action campaign efforts. Examples include:

• developing knowledge translation products on COVID-19 and women’s, children’s and adolescents’ health, such as digital toolkits, knowledge-to-action briefs and videos. The digital thematic toolkits showcase evidence-based guidance, advocacy and communication material as well as contextualized evidence from the field. Aligned with the World Health Organization’s (WHO) recommendations, the toolkits are in the form of living multimedia information packages that are action-oriented and user-friendly. The knowledge-to-action briefs highlight the impact of the pandemic across the seven Call to Action asks and how partners have adopted multisectoral and equity enhancing strategies to mitigate these impacts, including in humanitarian and fragile settings. Additionally, following the success of the COVID-19 breastfeeding video and as part of its self-care and behavioral change video series, PMNCH is producing two other multilingual animated videos on responsive caregiving and preventing violence against women and children during COVID-19, in collaboration with the WHO and the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF).
• producing an investment case for women’s, children’s and adolescents’ health focused on global health security, preparedness and response to provide essential evidence needed to inform advocacy, policy-making and financing for women’s, children’s and adolescents’ health during the COVID-19 recovery phase, including at regional and country levels; and
• developing a “Global Roadmap for women, children’s and adolescents’ health and well-being in humanitarian and fragile settings”, in collaboration with WHO, UNICEF and World Vision International. The Global Roadmap will provide a comprehensive strategy and indicate areas for action across the continuum that should be prioritized in national emergency preparedness and response efforts, and during the COVID-19 recovery phase in line with the efforts to build back better and fairer.