

Improving maternal and child health in South Africa

PATH's project portfolio addresses the intersection of HIV and vulnerable mothers and children

PATH's vision—a world where innovation ensures that health is within reach for everyone—resonates deeply in South Africa. Since overcoming apartheid and adopting a new constitution in 1994, the country has engaged in an authentic process of social change and reconciliation. Equity, including equity in access to health care services, is central to its commitment to repairing apartheid's social damage.

Alongside this progressive policy environment, however, pervasive implementation challenges remain. Despite substantial health care expenditures, only a minority of South Africans—some 15 to 20 percent—have a high degree of access to health services. The vast majority of South Africans has very limited access to services and depends on a public health system that struggles to keep up with demand.

Since establishing a presence in South Africa in 2005, PATH has developed a diverse project portfolio, a broad and secure funding base, an ever-growing reputation, and evidence of positive impact on the health of the people throughout the country. With offices in Durban, East London, and Johannesburg, PATH's South Africa Country Program is becoming an increasingly visible advocate for the country's human resources, technological capacity, and regional influence.

ADVANCING HEALTH TECHNOLOGIES FOR MOTHERS AND CHILDREN

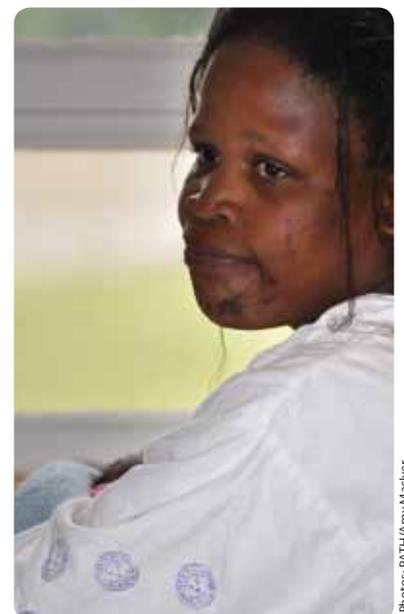
PATH's Maternal and Newborn Health Technology Initiative (MNTI) was established in 2007 to reduce high rates of maternal and newborn deaths in South Africa's KwaZulu Natal Province. The project is introducing and advancing innovative, lifesaving technologies and techniques that can help reduce preventable deaths. MNTI's integrated approach focuses on providing essential maternal and newborn care during the final stage of labour and immediately after birth—crucial stages at which effective interventions can prevent the leading causes of maternal and newborn mortality.

PREVENTING MOTHER-TO-CHILD TRANSMISSION OF HIV

Working together as the Khusela project, three organizations—PATH, Health Information Systems Programme, and South Africa Partners—have joined with the Eastern Cape Department of Health to reduce the impact of HIV and AIDS on mothers and babies. The project is based on an integrated approach to prevention of mother-to-child transmission (PMTCT) that delivers services throughout the continuum of antenatal care, from before pregnancy begins through the first months of a baby's life. The Khusela team is strengthening Eastern Cape Province's health systems, building the capacity of facilities and providers, increasing community demand for services, and integrating reproductive health into PMTCT efforts.

Sources of support

PATH's South Africa Country Program has a diversified funding base that includes support from The Atlantic Philanthropies, the US Agency for International Development (through its AIDSTAR program), the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (through the US President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief), and the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation.





CARING FOR THE CAREGIVERS OF ORPHANS AND VULNERABLE CHILDREN

South Africa is home to an estimated 2 million children who have lost one or both parents to AIDS. PATH, Health and Development Africa, and the International HIV/AIDS Alliance have joined together as the Thogomelo project to stabilize vulnerable children's environments by increasing the knowledge, abilities, and well-being of those who are responsible for them. With a dual focus on caregiver support and child protection, the project is developing accredited training materials for caregivers throughout the country. Incorporating emerging and promising practices from Africa, the Thogomelo project is designed to become part of the enduring fabric of South Africa's child-protection efforts.



ADVOCATING FOR SOUND MICROBICIDES RESEARCH IN AFRICA

Housed at PATH, the Global Campaign for Microbicides is a broad-based, international effort to build support for increased investment in microbicides and other user-controlled prevention methods. Increased engagement in these issues is particularly critical in Africa, where the majority of large-scale effectiveness trials take place.

PATH staff based in our Johannesburg office are working to strengthen microbicides advocacy and engage civil society groups in Kenya, South Africa, and other countries hosting multiple prevention trials. As part of this effort, the team coordinates the secretariat for the Microbicides Media and Communication Initiative, an online forum that supports communications officers working on microbicides issues.



SUPPORTING MIDWIVES WHO WORK ON HIV AND AIDS

Maternity services in South Africa—where one in three pregnant women is HIV positive—are not prepared to respond to HIV and AIDS appropriately or at scale. Midwives are well positioned to provide women with HIV prevention and treatment services, but strengthening the role of midwives requires their leadership and engagement.

The Midwives AIDS Alliance was launched at the 2008 Society of Midwives congress to address these issues and ensure that HIV appears on the maternal health agenda. The alliance is documenting PMTCT practices for midwives, hosting study tours, and facilitating events that support and expand midwives' skills and ability to respond to HIV and AIDS. These activities are creating a platform for midwives' voices and new opportunities for service.

TB INFECTION PREVENTION AND CONTROL

In Swaziland, which faces the highest tuberculosis (TB) incidence rate in the world, PATH and Stellenbosch University are supporting health facilities and laboratories in improving infection prevention and control practices in the context of HIV and AIDS. The team is engaged in a variety of activities to prevent and control TB infection: assessing infection-control practices and making recommendations for improvements, reviewing and updating guidelines, providing infection-control training for different cadres of health care workers, and providing technical assistance in the selection of equipment and services. Close collaboration and coordination with government and partner stakeholders are key to the project's success.

Photos: PATH/Amy MacIver



PATH is an international nonprofit organization that creates sustainable, culturally relevant solutions, enabling communities worldwide to break longstanding cycles of poor health. By collaborating with diverse public- and private-sector partners, PATH helps provide appropriate health technologies and vital strategies that change the way people think and act. PATH's work improves global health and well-being.

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February 2010