

For Immediate Release

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HIV, Maternal Mortality Link Demands Re-vamped US Policy

WASHINGTON, DC, April 14, 2010—Further progress in reducing the global maternal mortality ratio cannot be achieved without an aggressive shift in the U.S. approach to global health policy, the Center for Health and Gender Equity (CHANGE) announced today. While the overall global maternal mortality ratio has decreased according to a new study released yesterday in the Lancet, HIV is responsible for more than 60,000 maternal deaths each year. The data confirms the link between HIV and maternal mortality, and corroborates the necessity for comprehensive health programs that integrate HIV interventions and maternal health care.

"Smart U.S. foreign policy investments must address HIV and maternal health with integrated and coordinated programming," said Serra Sippel, president of CHANGE. "Anyone accessing HIV treatment must also have access to voluntary family planning and other reproductive health services, such as family planning, pre-natal care, cancer screening and treatment, and safe abortion services. Currently, HIV, maternal health, and family planning are funded, programmed, and evaluated separately, which ultimately pits the issues against each other. Given the recent research results, this approach also limits program effectiveness."

Reducing the maternal mortality ratio means honestly confronting the reality of illness, health care and those who access it.

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Effective U.S. global health policy must be:

- Integrated and coordinated: Illness does not recognize programmatic divisions.
- Woman-centered: Stemming global health epidemics depends on addressing the disparate conditions that put women at higher risk for poor health.
- Multi-sectoral: Poverty alleviation, education promotion, food provision, housing support, job creation and training, and environmental protection all contribute to positive health outcomes.
- Human rights-based: Health programs must respect individuals' autonomy and agency, ensuring that services are provided free from discrimination, coercion, and violence.
- Accessible: Health services must be youth-friendly, and financially and physically accessible.

The Obama Administration has indicated a move towards policy that meets the above criteria through the introduction of the Global Health Initiative (GHI). The GHI identifies program integration and a woman-centered approach as guiding principles. The U.S. has the opportunity to significantly reduce the maternal mortality rate through the GHI, but it needs to assure the initiative is adequately funded and coordinated among agencies.

For additional analysis, see "*Obama's Global Health Initiative: Getting It Right The First Time Around*," by CHANGE President Serra Sippel. <http://huff.to/a4nFLV>

About the Center for Health and Gender Equity

The Center for Health and Gender Equity (CHANGE) is a US-based non-governmental organization that seeks to ensure that U.S. international policies and programs promote sexual and reproductive health and rights through effective, evidence-based approaches to prevention and treatment of critical reproductive and sexual health concerns, and through increased funding for critical international programs and institutions. For more information, visit

www.genderhealth.org