

MATERNAL HEALTH

Our strategy

Maternal health is at the core of women's rights. It enables women to lead healthy lives, realize their human rights, and reach their full potential. UNFPA supports the development of quality health services for pregnancy, safe delivery and post-natal care through strengthening training in the health system and encouraging capacity development. We promote women's rights to maternal health care, with a particular focus on poor and marginalised women.

Our work

Putting women first

Maternal health is a priority for the Royal Government of Cambodia and there is high-level political support. The Ministry of Health's Fast Track Initiative Roadmap for Reducing Maternal and Newborn Mortality sets out the key steps needed to accelerate progress, in seven areas: emergency obstetric and neonatal care, skilled birth attendance, family planning, safe abortion, behaviour-change communication, removing financial barriers and maternal death surveillance and response. This is the framework for UNFPA's support to improving maternal health.

Making health care accessible to poor and rural women

In Cambodia, poverty is a major barrier to accessing the timely and skilled health care that is essential for the health of mothers and their babies. UNFPA has been among the donors supporting Health Equity Funds which enable poor women to access reproductive health services. UNFPA ensures that a full range of maternal and reproductive health services are supported by the scheme. For women in remote rural areas, distance and poor roads can also make it very hard to reach a health facility for a safe delivery. This is why UNFPA supports maternity waiting homes where women with higher risk pregnancies can stay close to a hospital or health centre until their delivery.



Photo: UNFPA Cambodia

The Facts :

- Women's use of maternal health services has increased sharply in recent years.
- 59% of women access routine antenatal care at least 4 times during pregnancy, compared to 9% in 2000.
- 71% of women have the assistance of a trained professional during delivery, compared to 32% in 2000.
- 54% of women give birth in a health facility compared to 10% in 2000.
- Cambodian mothers are now much less likely to die during childbirth. The MMR fell from 437 to 205 per 100,000 live births between 2000 and 2010.
- Every health centre in Cambodia now has at least one trained midwife.
- Despite these significant achievements, Cambodia's maternal mortality ratio is still high and death rates of newborns have not fallen over the last decade.

(Cambodia Demographic and Health Surveys, 2000, 2005 and 2010)

Developing the midwifery profession

Midwives are the key professionals providing the services that pregnant women need. Following a long period of conflict and isolation in the 1970s to 1990s, Cambodia lacked skilled people in many areas, including midwifery. UNFPA is among the agencies supporting the government to intensify and improve the quality of midwifery training, contributing to an enormous increase in the number of qualified midwives from 3,021 to 5,128* between 2007 and 2013 and enabling the government to place at least one midwife in every health centre throughout the country. At the same time UNFPA has supported the development of the Cambodian Midwives Council, including the development of a Code of Ethics and a registration system for the profession.

(*Report of Department of Personnel, Ministry of Health, 2013)

Lifesaving skills for emergencies

While most women can have a safe delivery with basic care from a midwife, some complicated deliveries require specialist interventions, such as caesarean section or blood transfusion. Despite improvements in the health system, Cambodia still lacks sufficient skilled staff and equipped facilities to provide Emergency Obstetric and Neonatal Care for all such deliveries. UNFPA supports the Ministry of Health's EmONC Improvement Plan. We have provided essential equipment and support the training of midwives and doctors to save the lives of women and babies.

Partnerships to improve women's health

Women's health is not only a health issue but also has human rights and gender dimensions. For this reason it is important to engage a range of partners in improving women's health. In Cambodia, UNFPA works in a partnership of agencies to support the health sector. We also engage with other sectors that can influence public opinion and community practices, including mass media, local authorities, civil society and Parliamentarians.

Addressing obstetric fistula

Difficult deliveries can leave women with lifelong health problems. One of the most debilitating injuries that can result from childbirth is an obstetric fistula, when severe injury during childbirth results in incontinence with serious health and social consequences. UNFPA has supported an NGO, the Children's Surgical Centre, to reach out and find women with fistula and provide corrective surgery to restore their health and dignity. So far 25 women have been treated, training has been provided for surgeons and surgical equipment has been provided.

Donor Support: UNFPA's work in support of improving maternal health has benefited from additional support from the Australian Government and from the Maternal Health Trust Fund.



Photo: UNFPA Cambodia

CASE STUDY – Midwives save the lives of a woman and her baby

In a remote village in the north eastern region of Cambodia, a young mother, Ms. Hang Dèng went into labour. Her mother, concerned by her daughter's condition, rushed her to a health centre a 2 hour journey away by road or 1 hour by boat. As she went into a convulsion, the young mother was then referred to the provincial hospital by an ambulance, a further 3 hours away. Upon arrival, her water had already broken and the baby was displaying signs of foetal distress. Doctors decided to do an emergency operation to save her and the life of her baby.

Hang Dèng could have died if there was a further delay in her referral to the hospital. Ms. Thang Sum, a midwife of more than 20 years, helped to save the life of Hang Dèng, but despite her knowledge and her wealth of practical experience, Ms. Thang says she has received only a few courses on life saving skills.

After the successful delivery of the baby, Hang Dèng's mother said "our family did not have enough money to prepare for the delivery so when Hang Dèng went into a long labour we left it until it was almost too late. Now, I am happy to see that my daughter and her new born baby survived."

Some young mothers are fortunate, such as Ms. Krong Ream who lives far away from the health center but came to stay in a maternity waiting home prior to giving birth. At the home she receives a maternal check up every day and financial support from the government health equity fund project supported by UNFPA. "I feel more comfortable here than at home. At home it is unsafe and I worry that something can go wrong during my pregnancy", said Ms. Ream.



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