

Radically Reducing Maternal Mortality: The Maternal Center of Excellence in Sierra Leone

A COMPREHENSIVE MODEL FOR ENDING PREVENTABLE MATERNAL AND CHILD DEATH

AN UNACCEPTABLE INJUSTICE

There is no single statistic that so starkly highlights injustice towards women than this: **more than 800 women die every day due to complications related to pregnancy and childbirth around the world**, despite the fact that maternal mortality remains an overwhelmingly preventable cause of death. The babies of these women are much less likely to survive as well, and each day 14,000 children under the age of five die around the world. **COVID-19 is exacerbating these circumstances** as health resources are further divided, especially among the world's most vulnerable communities, where potentially fatal complications occur in 15% of births. These tragedies illuminate the fault lines of our global society in promoting gender equity, health equity, and access to basic human rights. This is a global emergency.

The good news: these injustices have proven cures.

Maternal mortality remains an eminently preventable cause of death, with the implementation of effective and accessible maternal health care. Partners In Health (PIH) is uniquely positioned to end this devastation facing women and their families, leveraging 30 years of innovative and scalable programs in maternal and child health to create systemic solutions in partnership with ministries of health around the world. At this critical juncture in the global fight against the COVID-19 pandemic, PIH will lead an ambitious Maternal and Child Health Initiative over

the next five years to mobilize a global, multifaceted effort to stop preventable maternal and child death.

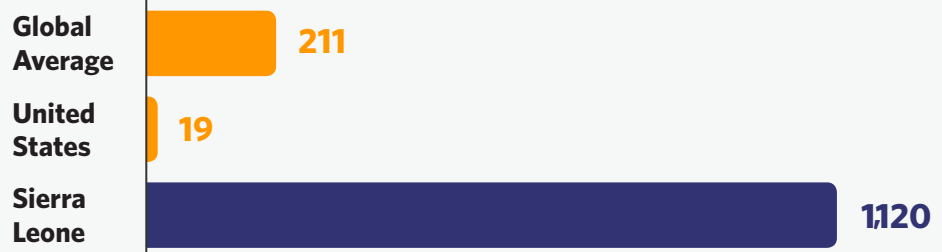
To launch this global Maternal and Child Health Initiative, PIH will establish a Maternal Center of Excellence (MCOE) in rural Kono District, Sierra Leone—the epicenter of the world's maternal health crisis. In Sierra Leone, one in 20 mothers are at risk of dying prematurely from a maternal cause over their lifetime—one of the highest maternal mortality rates in the world. Ten percent of children will also die before their fifth birthday in Sierra Leone—among the highest in the world. The MCOE will provide high-quality care to women and families who need it most, build local health capacity for sustained impact, and create a blueprint for scaling proven interventions in women's health around the world.

Through this ambitious effort, the MCOE will enable PIH to consolidate its global learnings in maternal and child health and demonstrate the impact that comprehensive investments can make. Ultimately, the MCOE will dramatically improve health outcomes in Sierra Leone—where it is needed the most, while also serving as the cornerstone of learning and innovation that will catalyze PIH's expansion of related programming around the world and reduce maternal and child mortality across the globe.

MATERNAL DEATHS

per 100,000 live births

Data provided by UNICEF,
Sept. 2019.



PROJECT BACKGROUND

Maternal and child health is the foundation of PIH's work around the world. Each year, two-thirds of the clinical services PIH delivers are provided to women and children—with over 2 million health visits and deliveries each year. Alongside the implementation of direct clinical care, PIH works to implement and scale innovations in the field, with examples ranging from successfully expanding uptake of long-acting reversible contraceptives in Haiti; supporting the government of Rwanda in developing model Pediatric Development Clinics that support high-risk children; and working with the government of Lesotho to reform its national health system based on PIH's model maternal and

community health programs. In Sierra Leone, PIH began working in 2014 at the invitation of the Ministry of Health and Sanitation (MoHS) to respond to West Africa's historic Ebola outbreak. While leading efforts to treat Ebola patients and contain the spread, PIH made a long-term commitment to support the government in revitalizing the country's health sector and improving access to care for millions of Sierra Leoneans. Since that time, PIH has led targeted programming to radically improve health outcomes throughout the country, with a particular focus on maternal health.



▼ In 2020, PIH's model primary care facility, and comprehensive support of Koidu Government Hospital (KGH), the district's only secondary care facility, saw:

Zero
maternal deaths
at Wellbody
Clinic—for the
fourth year in a
row

97%
increase in
family planning
uptake at
Wellbody &
KGH

86%
reduction in
stillbirth rate
at Wellbody—
from 1.8% to
0.3%

26%
increase in
life-saving
C-sections at
KGH

Despite the early successes of PIH's efforts, Sierra Leone remains one of the most dangerous places on earth for women and children to live. And the need to act is more urgent than ever: The COVID-19 pandemic threatens to exacerbate already dire circumstances. We know that maternal health outcomes are worsened by disease outbreaks: During the Ebola outbreak, maternal mortality increased by an estimated 22 percent. It is imperative that the maternal health emergency be addressed alongside, and because of, COVID-19, to minimize the long-term, additive impact on maternal mortality rates yet again.

A BOLD SOLUTION

The Maternal Center of Excellence is PIH's response to both the devastating circumstances and promising advancements we've seen in women's health in Kono District, across Sierra Leone, and around the world. In partnership with the Sierra Leonean MoHS, over the next five years, PIH will:

- 1 construct, equip, and staff** an estimated 166-bed national MCOE;
- 2 launch and scale services** to improve and expand access to a comprehensive, advanced package of care for women and children;
- 3 establish the MCOE as a hub of innovation** through the development of clinical training, mentorship, and research programs;
- 4 promote scale and replication of the MCOE model** in Sierra Leone and globally, through government accompaniment, advocacy, and the transfer of knowledge and innovation.



Project Timeline: PIH broke ground in Spring 2021 and the start of services is slated for 2023. Care will be scaled up over the first three years of operations, and the MCOE is anticipated to be operating at full capacity by the end of 2025.

PACKAGE OF SERVICES

INPATIENT Pre- and postnatal complications | Routine labor and delivery | Obstetric emergencies | Surgery | Neonatal intensive care

OUTPATIENT Routine pre- and postnatal care | Childhood vaccinations | Family planning | Routine gynecology | Oncology

INTEGRATED Prevention of mother-to-child HIV transmission | Adolescent and youth-friendly health services | Sexual and gender-based violence screening and treatment

SOCIAL Mental health counseling | Vulnerability screening and referral

STRUCTURE & DESIGN

CLINICAL Estimated 120 inpatient beds | Outpatient clinic | Oxygen plant | Blood bank | ICU | Neonatal ICU | Kangaroo mother care suite | Surgical suite with modern infection control

ORGANIZATIONAL Efficient patient flow | Defined zones of care (high to low acuity) | Adequate visibility of patients by clinicians | Simulation labs and staff education space | Staff living quarters

ENVIRONMENTAL Use-based energy management | Artificial intelligence-determined design leveraging natural weather patterns for cooling, lighting

SOCIAL Emphasis on patient privacy | Outdoor areas | Respectful, dignity-driven aesthetics

A HIGH-IMPACT INVESTMENT

By 2026, the MCOE will double maternal and newborn health care coverage in Kono, in addition to generating the following projected impact:

3x

increase in family planning visits

2x

increase in the number of adolescents accessing Youth Friendly Services

120%

increase in facility-based deliveries

140%

increase in district-wide C-section coverage rate

2x

increase in antenatal care (ANC) visits

Investing in women’s health results in incalculable health, social, and economic improvements, making it one of the most cost-effective and proven means to advance solutions for a healthier and more equitable world. PIH’s decision to invest in the MCOE was determined using the global base of evidence and impacts that result from saving women’s lives:

HEALTH IMPACTS:

Delivering known, lifesaving maternal interventions can prevent half of maternal deaths. Saving mothers’ lives means improving the chances their babies live, too—it can prevent about two-thirds of child deaths, and half to two-thirds of newborn deaths.

SOCIAL IMPACTS:

Protecting mothers stops the cycle of missed opportunity for their children, and importantly, their daughters. Maternal death has dire implications for the surviving household’s financial stability. Among surviving daughters in particular, school dropout and early marriage rates soar. Maternal deaths perpetuate intergenerational cycles of poverty and gender inequality. To invest in women’s health is to advance women’s rights, and signal to women and girls that they deserve better.

ECONOMIC IMPACTS:

Saving mothers and newborns substantially improves economic productivity. USAID estimates that maternal and newborn mortality leads to \$15 billion in lost potential productivity every year. In comparison, The Lancet and the World Health Organization estimate that sufficient expansions to maternal care would cost an annual \$4.1-6.1 billion.

A PROMISING FUTURE

By making available proven health interventions and strengthening capacity within the public health sector, PIH will transform health outcomes for women and families in Sierra Leone; establish new evidence on what's possible in creating systemic, long-term solutions for women; and present a global

example that can be replicated and scaled. In all, the MCOE will serve as a model health facility and a hub for clinical training and research, and become a platform of innovation and expertise in women's health in Sierra Leone and around the world.

PIH's mission is both medical and moral. Making motherhood safer is more than just a health initiative—

it is a human rights imperative. Through the MCOE, PIH will advance women's right to safe motherhood, and defend the inherent and connective value of every woman's and girl's future. Together, PIH will advance the right to safe motherhood and childhood in Sierra Leone and beyond, and a more equitable world for all.



Emma Bangura, 7 months pregnant, received prenatal care at Wellbody Clinic.



Elizabeth Koroma, Susan Kellie, and Isah Kaimako stayed at Wellbody Clinic's birth waiting home.



Umu Dicko, mother of 7, rests in the Koidu Government Hospital postpartum area after her latest delivery.

ABOUT PARTNERS IN HEALTH

PIH works to advance equity in health care globally. We aspire to redefine what is possible in delivering innovative, scalable, and sustainable solutions to the world's most intractable health problems. By partnering with Ministries of Health all over the world, PIH is successfully transforming health outcomes, while creating an evidence-base and a roadmap for scaling solutions that advance the right to health for all. For over 30 years, PIH has honed its expert experience in global health delivery and compassionate caregiving model to improve access to care for women, children, and communities all over the world.