

USAID Celebrates 50th Anniversary

Agency has extensive history of saving lives through global health R&D

This week, the US Agency for International Development (USAID) celebrates 50 years of leadership and expertise in addressing development challenges to improve lives across the globe.

Since its inception, USAID has had a rich and extensive history of supporting global health work, including research and development (R&D). The recently established Global Health Initiative (GHI), which prioritizes science and innovation, is a reflection of the agency's longstanding commitment to addressing deadly diseases around the world.

Starting almost immediately after it was founded in 1961, USAID began to play a critical role in supporting and developing innovations that save lives around the world. Since the 1960s, USAID has supported oral rehydration therapy (ORT), a treatment for diarrhea that is credited with saving tens of millions of children's lives. In 1979, USAID made the largest donor investment in the establishment of the International Centre for Diarrhoeal Disease Research, where scientists continue to conduct important R&D to improve ORT.

USAID continued to show its dedication to improving global health in 1966, when it joined the global effort to eradicate smallpox, a contagious disease that killed more than 300 million people in the 20th century. In the same decade that USAID began to fight the disease, 10 million to 15 million people contracted the disease a year, and more than 2 million people died from it. Through investing in research that adapted the mechanics of US military jet injectors for application of the smallpox vaccine, USAID played a critical role in achieving global eradication of the disease.

USAID expanded its support for critical global health R&D during recent decades by providing critical funding to improve global health. For example, USAID funded research to develop the Uniject™ injection system, a tool that delivers the drug oxytocin to help reduce excessive bleeding during the third stage of childbirth.

In recent years, USAID's efforts to leverage R&D in fighting HIV have expanded. Notable among this support has been an investment in research for microbicide gels, a tool that has the potential to help women protect themselves from the virus. Through investing in a groundbreaking trial held at the Centre for the AIDS Programme Research in South Africa (CAPRISA), USAID played a critical role in supporting the first proof-of-concept trial that showed a microbicide can protect women against HIV and herpes.

USAID's commitment to global health R&D remains strong today. For example, USAID is a vital partner to many GHTC members:

- USAID and the International AIDS Vaccine Initiative (IAVI) have worked together under a cooperative agreement since 2006 to accelerate the discovery of an AIDS vaccine.
- USAID also supports the Global Alliance for TB Drug Development (TB Alliance) in its effort to develop better drugs to treat tuberculosis (TB).
- USAID also contributed significant funding to the Meningitis Vaccine Project (MVP)—a partnership between PATH and the World Health Organization—in the discovery and delivery of a new meningitis vaccine. USAID supported a comprehensive analysis of the economic costs of meningitis epidemics, aided efforts to improve meningitis surveillance, and helped to address regulatory issues.

The future of global health R&D is sure to hold many major breakthroughs and save millions lives around the world with this continued commitment and investment from USAID.

Additional resources:

- [Read more about USAID's 50th Anniversary](#)
- [Read more about the global health initiative](#)
- [Read more about USAID and its involvement in global health R&D](#)
- [Read a report on USAID's leadership](#)