



# Saving lives through research

## *USAID's role in creating breakthrough global health products*

The US Agency for International Development (USAID) is the nation's lead foreign assistance agency. Throughout its 50-year history, USAID has worked with other government agencies, the private sector, and nongovernmental organizations to support the development and introduction of affordable health products appropriate for addressing diseases and health issues in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs).

With its on-the-ground presence in more than 100 countries worldwide, USAID leverages its expertise and broad geographical reach to uniquely support and guide health research and development (R&D) activities. With field expertise in the countries where disease poses such a heavy health burden, USAID is established as one of the best positioned agencies in the federal government to conduct the research necessary to ensure that the most appropriate health tools are ultimately used effectively on the ground.

### **A strong history of innovation**

Throughout USAID's history, global health R&D and innovation have been at the core of the agency's activities. The agency's strong commitment to health innovation has supported the development and introduction of affordable health products. USAID has also helped create policies and practices appropriate for addressing diseases and health issues in LMICs.

As the examples below indicate, USAID has been involved in the R&D process from basic research to product rollout and field implementation:

- USAID's Malaria Vaccine Development Program has been funding vaccine R&D since 1966 and supported early-stage research that was essential for the development of RTS,S—the most advanced malaria vaccine candidate—which could be approved and available as early as late 2015.
- USAID supported the development of pivotal contraceptive technologies, including the first long-acting vaginal ring and a contraceptive injection device.
- USAID supported the adaptation of a proven antiseptic into a new formulation for umbilical cord care which could save 300,000 babies annually at a cost of less than 50 cents per dose.
- For more than 25 years, USAID's HealthTech program has helped to identify health needs and then adapt, design, develop, and advance appropriate health technology solutions. Key examples include diagnostic tests for infectious diseases and safe-injection technologies.
- USAID has supported research to create heat indicators to prevent vaccine reuse, assure stability, and allow for delivery to remote areas where health care is not available.
- The agency also supports operations research to improve the delivery, outreach and quality of health services.



Photo credit: PATH

USAID has played a critical role for decades in supporting health R&D to improve lives worldwide.

## A sustained commitment to R&D

In recent years, USAID has continued to demonstrate an unbroken dedication to global health research and product development. The agency is a leading supporter of a range of product development efforts, including providing funding to nonprofit product development organizations (NPPDs)—an effective model that combines the resources of government, the experience of the private sector, and the know-how of nonprofit groups. For instance, USAID is the largest funder of the International AIDS Vaccine Initiative. The agency also supports NPPDs developing new malaria drugs and vaccines, tuberculosis drugs, new medicines for river blindness and elephantiasis, diagnostics for Chagas disease, and microbicides to prevent HIV/AIDS.

USAID has also taken steps to elevate science, technology, and research at the institutional level. In 2012, USAID launched its Center for Accelerating Innovation and Impact in the Bureau of Global Health, which, among other goals, aims to catalyze innovation and partnerships for global health technologies.

In 2014, the agency launched the US Global Development Lab, which aims to bring together nonprofit groups, researchers, and entrepreneurs to develop, test, and scale breakthrough innovations for global development challenges, including ending preventable maternal and child deaths.

## Supporting innovation into the future

As demonstrated above, USAID has played a critical role for decades in supporting global health R&D. As USAID leaders chart a course forward for the agency, health innovation and R&D should continue to be major areas of focus. Given the breadth and scope of its product development activities, USAID should also continue to release its reports to Congress on its health-related research and development strategy. These reports provide valuable information on the agency's achievements and priorities for public health innovation worldwide. They also help to increase transparency on critical information such as USAID's collaboration and coordination with other federal departments and agencies.

Given the vital role of the new US Global Development Lab and Center for Accelerating Innovation and Impact, USAID leaders should continue to support these initiatives and elevate innovation and research across the agency. A key part of this effort will include supporting R&D within all of the agency's health programs, which would fill gaps in areas for which USAID currently does not support product development.

Because USAID needs support from Congress to carry out its global health R&D work, Congress should provide the agency with sufficient funding to undertake these important activities.

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## About the Global Health Technologies Coalition

The Global Health Technologies Coalition (GHTC) is a group of more than 25 nonprofit organizations working to increase awareness of the urgent need for tools that save lives in the developing world, as well as the most effective policies and programs needed to develop and deliver new health tools. These tools include new vaccines, drugs, microbicides, diagnostics, insecticides, and devices. The coalition advocates for increased and effective use of public resources, incentives to encourage private investment, and streamlined regulatory systems. The GHTC is housed at PATH. Learn more at [www.ghtcoalition.org](http://www.ghtcoalition.org).