

## Markets matter

### Improving access to lifesaving maternal health products

No matter where they live, women should be able to safely deliver healthy babies. However, pregnant women in low- and middle-income countries have inadequate access to lifesaving maternal health products, resulting in preventable deaths due to complications in pregnancy and childbirth. The leading causes of maternal mortality globally are severe bleeding following delivery (postpartum hemorrhage or PPH) and high blood pressure and seizures during pregnancy (pre-eclampsia and eclampsia). Oxytocin and misoprostol prevent and treat PPH, and magnesium sulfate prevents and treats pre-eclampsia and eclampsia. In 2012, the United Nations Commission on Life-Saving Commodities (UNCoLSC) endorsed these three health products as essential and noted that if widely accessible and properly used, they could save many women's lives.

#### MATERNAL HEALTH AND MARKETS

Even the most effective products cannot save lives or improve health if they do not reach the women who need them. While oxytocin, misoprostol, and magnesium sulfate have been identified as lifesaving and are all relatively low cost, many women living in low- and middle-income countries still do not have reliable access to these products. Further, when products are available, they may be of poor quality or not appropriately designed for delivery in low-resource settings.

*Every two minutes a woman dies from complications during pregnancy and childbirth. 98 percent of these deaths are preventable.* —Every Mother Counts

The world will not achieve ambitious global health goals—such as the Sustainable Development Goal target to reduce maternal deaths to less than 70 deaths per 100,000 annual live births by 2030—without improving access to lifesaving maternal health products. To improve access, the global health community must strengthen markets—the systems, structures, and institutions that facilitate the buying and selling of lifesaving products such as oxytocin, misoprostol, and magnesium sulfate. When markets function well, appropriately designed, affordable, and quality-assured products are consistently available to women who need them.



PATH/Evelyn Hockstein

#### UNDERSTANDING MARKET SHORTCOMINGS

Advocates are likely familiar with the visible signs of market shortcomings. Inconsistent or limited product availability, lack of affordable products, use of products that are of poor or unverified quality, unusable products due to poor design, or a combination of these issues are symptoms of market shortcomings.

These shortcomings can be addressed through direct market interventions. While market strengthening interventions require a deep understanding of specific market dynamics and potential interventions, advocates can play a critical role in strengthening the **policy environment** in which markets function.

To function well, markets need supportive policies that appropriately regulate businesses and providers, safeguard consumers, and provide incentives for companies to supply lifesaving, health-improving products. A helpful first step for advocates interested in pursuing advocacy for market strengthening to support improved maternal health outcomes is to better understand market strengthening interventions and their potential for impact.

## MARKET STRENGTHENING FOR MATERNAL HEALTH PRODUCTS

Market strengthening involves influencing the practices of manufacturers, buyers, suppliers, governments, donors, health care providers, and/or consumers to improve how products are produced, procured, distributed, and delivered. Such interventions, implemented by specialists with a strong understanding of markets and in coordination with all market actors, respond to the dynamics and failings of a specific market and seek to alter them to improve product access, and ultimately public health.

Market strengthening interventions have achieved powerful public health impacts across various health areas, including antiretroviral drugs, vaccines, and contraceptives. In maternal health, market strengthening has demonstrated strong potential to address market shortcomings related to product availability, quality, and appropriateness. The following table outlines **examples of market strengthening interventions** for maternal health products identified in a recent [report](#) published by the Reproductive Health Supplies Coalition (RHSC), in partnership with PATH and Results for Development (R4D).

### INTERVENTION AND APPROACH

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AVAILABILITY	<p><b>Promoting availability at community level:</b> In many parts of the world, women give birth at home or in low-resource health facilities with limited access to a skilled attendant. Misoprostol is a heat-stable tablet that does not require any special skills, equipment, or facilities to use, making it a valuable option for the prevention and treatment of PPH in settings where oxytocin is unavailable. <a href="#">Gynuity Health Projects</a> has studied PPH care in various contexts, placing misoprostol in the hands of traditional birth attendants, community health workers, auxiliary nurse midwives, and pregnant women themselves in settings as diverse as Pakistan, Afghanistan, India, Senegal, Uganda, and Egypt.</p>
	<p><b>Strengthening quantification to improve availability:</b> Quantification is a critical step that assists program and supply chain managers in ensuring reliable availability of maternal health products through demand forecasting and supply planning. It is the process of estimating the quantities and costs of the products required and determining when the products should be delivered to ensure an uninterrupted supply. Under the UNCoLSC, <a href="#">John Snow, Inc.</a> and the USAID-funded <a href="#">Systems for Improved Access to Pharmaceuticals Project</a>, implemented by <a href="#">Management Sciences for Health</a>, developed quantification guidance for all 13 essential commodities. This guidance has been used to improve the quality of national forecasts for maternal health products when logistics and services data are unavailable, helping improve supply planning and availability. The guidance can be downloaded <a href="#">here</a>.</p>
	<p><b>Increasing market information to improve availability:</b> Manufacturers and suppliers need to understand a specific market, including the size of the market and its opportunity for growth, before investing. With support from USAID and the RHSC, <a href="#">Jhpiego</a> developed business cases for manufacturers to invest in the production and supply of quality-assured oxytocin, misoprostol, and magnesium sulfate to low-resource settings. The business cases address critical knowledge gaps related to the market sizes and dynamics of these three product markets and have been used to engage with both procurers and potential manufacturers to increase the number of quality-assured products available. The business cases can be downloaded <a href="#">here</a>.</p>
QUALITY	<p><b>Providing technical assistance to manufacturers:</b> Technical assistance—or the transfer of key knowledge and skills—is critical for many manufacturers seeking to address a range of issues, from strengthening quality management systems to improving the efficiency of production processes. <a href="#">Concept Foundation</a> is providing technical support to manufacturers of maternal health products to strengthen their quality management systems and support achievement of WHO prequalification. This work is expected to improve the quality of maternal health products available.</p>
APPROPRIATENESS	<p><b>Adapting for context:</b> Due in part to inappropriate storage and transport conditions, there is evidence that the quality of oxytocin being administered to many women in low-resource settings is poor. Since oxytocin loses some of its potency when exposed to excessive heat, <a href="#">PATH</a> developed visual time temperature indicators (TTI) for oxytocin to alert distributors and providers to excessive temperature exposure during transport and storage of oxytocin and prevent the use of potentially ineffective products. This important effort to protect the quality of products in low- and middle-income countries is ongoing. <a href="#">PATH</a> is conducting a feasibility study in Ghana to assess use of the TTI with existing oxytocin supplies. More information is available <a href="#">here</a>.</p>
	<p><b>Improving products:</b> Several organizations, including <a href="#">PATH</a>, <a href="#">Merck for Mothers</a>, <a href="#">Ferring Pharmaceuticals</a>, <a href="#">Gynuity Health Projects</a>, <a href="#">Monash University</a>, and <a href="#">GlaxoSmithKline</a>, are researching and testing new designs to improve maternal health products for use in low-resource settings. These include inhalable oxytocin, non-electric pumps for magnesium sulfate administration, and thermostable carbetocin (a drug that produces a similar effect as oxytocin).</p>

Learn more about market strengthening to improve access to health products at [sites.path.org/advocacyandpolicy](https://sites.path.org/advocacyandpolicy).



[www.path.org](http://www.path.org)

PATH is the leader in global health innovation. An international nonprofit organization, we save lives and improve health, especially among women and children. We accelerate innovation across five platforms—vaccines, drugs, diagnostics, devices, and system and service innovations—that harness our entrepreneurial insight, scientific and public health expertise, and passion for health equity. By mobilizing partners around the world, we take innovation to scale, working alongside countries primarily in Africa and Asia to tackle their greatest health needs. Together, we deliver measurable results that disrupt the cycle of poor health. Learn more at [www.path.org](http://www.path.org).

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