Women everywhere have a variety of life goals—personal, family, economic, and civic—but without high-quality sexual and reproductive health (SRH) care, their ability to reach these goals is severely constrained. PATH works to help women and adolescent girls by creating and improving technologies, products, practices, and programs—especially those that support autonomy and allow for self-care. We advocate for women’s access to appropriate and affordable products in low-resource settings and for health services that meet the needs of women and adolescent girls.

Young women in particular struggle to gain access to information and services and face the additional barrier of disapproval by communities and health providers when they do seek care. The arc of a young woman’s life can be disrupted by unintended pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections (STIs), including HIV, so supporting her is a priority.

Essential components of good SRH care include accurate information and reliable access to appropriate products, facilities, and providers. In addition, women need autonomy to make decisions about their health; still, in too many places, women must continue to fight for and retain this right. Their ability to do so depends on building their health assets—resources such as knowledge, self-confidence, relationships, and access to products and services.

**Developing and improving practices and technologies that enhance autonomy**

**Building health assets and SRH literacy**

In Mayuge District, Uganda, PATH is collaborating with community women’s groups to pilot a novel group-based Reproductive Health Literacy and Empowerment project that will address persistent misconceptions around contraception. The intervention offers participants a safe space to learn about the female reproductive system and how contraceptive methods work, and to talk openly about issues that affect their lives and health, with an emphasis on women’s roles and rights.

PATH is an implementing partner of the USAID Determined, Resilient, Empowered, AIDS-free, Mentored, and Safe (DREAMS) Initiative to reduce HIV/AIDS in adolescent girls and young women by creating a safe environment for girls to attend school and strengthening their capacity to make healthy choices. We enhance access to youth-friendly services and support communities and families with sustainable interventions; encourage girls to enroll in school; and support and train families to bolster their role as the basic unit of protection for vulnerable girls.

**Contraceptive choice and access**

Subcutaneous DMPA (DMPA-SC) is a widely available and easy-to-use injectable contraceptive that combines the drug and a needle in the single-use, prefilled Uniject™ injection system. Subcutaneous DMPA-SC can be administered by community health workers, pharmacists, and even women themselves through self-injection, further expanding women's access to contraception, especially in remote areas. In a three-year pilot project, PATH coordinated the country-led introduction of this product in four sub-Saharan countries. We are sharing data and experience from all introduction activities with policymakers and implementers in many countries to help ensure evidence-based approaches to increasing contraceptive access. Following on the success of these efforts, we are co-leading the Subcutaneous DMPA Access Collaborative with John Snow, Inc., to work with ministries of health and partners to facilitate planning for introduction and scale-up of DMPA-SC. The Access Collaborative will provide technical assistance and coordination support in 8 to 12 countries.

**Woman-focused barrier methods**

PATH worked for several years with women and couples to develop an improved female condom—the only woman-initiated technology that protects against both unintended pregnancy and STIs, including HIV. In 2016, with support from PATH, the Woman’s Condom received World Health Organization (WHO) prequalification, ensuring that the United Nations and other parties can procure the product globally.
agencies can procure the product at affordable prices for low-resource country programs.

The single-sized Caya® contoured diaphragm, originally developed by PATH and partners as the SILCS diaphragm, is especially useful for those who are avoiding hormonal methods, have infrequent sex, or want a backup for their existing method.b Caya is available over the counter and can be used for up to two years. Assessments are underway to determine whether the Caya diaphragm can also function as a low-cost, reusable method for microbicide gel delivery, protecting from HIV infection as well as unplanned pregnancy.

Microarray patches
A microarray patch (MAP) is an easy-to-use, discreet drug delivery system under development for administration of vaccines and other drugs. PATH and partners are testing the feasibility and acceptability of MAP technology for two new indications: (1) to deliver an antiretroviral (ARV) drug for pre-exposure prophylaxis to protect from HIV infection; and (2) as a multipurpose prevention technology to administer both an ARV and a hormonal contraceptive to protect against both HIV infection and unintended pregnancy.

Women’s cancers
Cervical cancer
For the first time in history, the elimination of cervical cancer is within reach, and this year the WHO Director-General made a global call for action on elimination. Molecular tests to detect human papillomavirus (HPV) infection and prevent cancer are more sensitive than other methods and are cost effective. PATH and private-sector partners have made HPV testing available and affordable even for areas with limited resources. An exciting strategy for molecular testing is vaginal self-sampling without a pelvic exam, which is transforming screening programs in low-resource settings and may bring universal, population-scale testing to reality. PATH’s Scale-Up project is working to expand access to HPV testing and to increase the use of thermal ablation as an effective and affordable treatment for precancerous lesions.

Breast cancer
In Peru, PATH collaborated with the government to develop a model of breast health care that aims to improve breast cancer screening, diagnosis, and referral services at the community level. We also created training curricula and learning aids for community health promoters, community midwives, general physicians, and volunteer patient navigators. These curricula have been adapted by the Peruvian National Cancer Institute for use at a national breast cancer center.

Ensuring that technologies and services are available, accessible, and affordable
Pharmacy-based services
PATH has engaged community pharmacies and drug shops—primary sources of health information and supplies in low-resource settings—to increase access to contraceptive products and other SRH technologies and services. We have included pharmacists in our training programs for DMPA-SC in order to support widespread availability of this contraceptive. To improve the SRH of adolescent girls, we have helped build the capacity of commercial pharmacy and drug shop workers to provide SRH information, products, and services that are youth friendly.

Consistent supplies of products
PATH serves as the secretariat of the Reproductive Health Supplies Coalition, an alliance of 400+ members that works to ensure that women and men in low- and middle-income countries have reliable access to high-quality, affordable SRH supplies. PATH administers and coordinates Coalition operations, organizes member meetings, represents the Coalition in international and national forums, and provides global leadership in making these essential supplies available in low-resource settings.

Total market approach for sexual and reproductive health
In a total market approach (TMA), governments and donors meet the needs of those with few financial resources, while the private sector provides products and services to more prosperous segments of the population. PATH strengthens public-private dialogue around SRH and disseminates lessons learned to promote readiness for country-led decision-making using a TMA. In addition, we have created workshop materials and curricula to guide government, nongovernmental, and private-sector stakeholders through the development of national TMA plans.

PATH’s work in sexual and reproductive health
DMPA-SC Access Collaborative: https://www.path.org/articles/dmpa-sc-collaborative/

Woman’s Condom: https://www.path.org/resources/womans-condom-comfortable-and-confident-protection-for-women-and-men/

SILCS Diaphragm: https://www.path.org/resources/silcs-diaphragm/

Women’s cancers: https://www.path.org/cancer/

Reproductive Health Supplies Coalition: http://www.rhsupplies.org

Total market approach: https://www.path.org/resources/planning-guide-for-a-total-market-approach-to-increase-access-to-family-planning/