



A PROMISE IS A PROMISE

UNIVERSAL ACCESS TO REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH

UNIVERSAL ACCESS to reproductive health is key to achieving the Millennium Development Goals. MDG 5, “Improve Maternal Health,” particularly target 5b, “Achieve Universal Access to Reproductive Health,” is the most off-track of all MDGs, even though the critical importance of reproductive health to development has been widely acknowledged. Universal access to reproductive health is the key to:

- reducing maternal mortality
- preventing unwanted pregnancies
- curbing the spread of sexually transmitted infections, including HIV, and AIDS
- empowering women and girls to exercise their sexual and reproductive rights through greater decision-making powers
- building a more sustainable world for all women, men and young people regardless of gender, sexual orientation, or social and economic status

However, evidence shows that progress towards MDG 5 has been slow and uneven. Efforts to achieve MDG 5b must be scaled up considerably in order to meet the needs of all women and mothers.

WHY UNIVERSAL ACCESS TO REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH?

MDG 5 is not only about reducing maternal deaths, it is about improving the reproductive health and quality of life for women in the years before they become mothers and throughout adulthood.

MDG 5b recognizes that the health and well-being of mothers and their children is influenced significantly by the health, knowledge and choices available to women while they are adolescents and during times that they may be in a sexual relationship, but are not and do not wish to become pregnant. MDG 5b aims to empower girls and women by giving them the freedom to exercise their sexual and reproductive rights. Sexual and reproductive choices, represented and measured by the indicators of MDG 5b, will give women and girls greater decision-making and negotiation power within the sexual and intimate relationships that shape their health and their lives, and enable them to ensure their own health and well-being, and to choose their own life path.

UNIVERSAL ACCESS TO REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH refers to a full package of services including comprehensive sexuality education, access to contraception, maternity care (ante and post natal care and skilled birth attendance), emergency obstetric care, and safe abortion services, as well as the prevention and treatment of sexually transmitted infections, including HIV, and programs that address violence against women and promote gender equality.

MDG 5b is a building block for the other MDGs

Maternal health services are too often offered in isolation, despite evidence which shows that the greatest impact is made when a comprehensive package of sexual and reproductive health services is available at one site. MDG 5b, which champions the comprehensive approach within MDG 5, will make a substantial contribution towards the other MDGs.

Goal 1: Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger	Reproductive self-determination and health allows women and couples to escape poverty by planning their families according to their financial situation. It also allows people to save money and increase their income by having time and energy to engage in income-generating and/or educational activities.
Goal 2: Achieve universal primary education	When women and couples can plan their families, they are better able to manage resources and finance their children's education. When girls and young women can prevent unwanted pregnancies, they often achieve higher levels of education.
Goal 3: Promote gender equality and empower women	Comprehensive reproductive health programmes empower women, giving them the freedom to make informed choices about their lives.
Goal 4: Reduce child mortality	Healthy women are able to provide better care for their children. When women can space their births, each child benefits through better nutrition and more attention.
Goal 6: Combat HIV and AIDS, malaria and other diseases	When HIV, AIDS and reproductive health services are integrated, stigma is reduced and people have greater access to services and support.
Goal 7: Ensure environmental sustainability	Families that can choose whether and when to have children are better able to manage scarce resources, including food, land and water.

Reference: Sippel, S (2009) Change for her starts with us. Monday Developments.

Act NOW to raise the priority of MDG 5b

- Work with Government leaders to ensure that their efforts under MDG 5 include activities that contribute towards MDG 5b. The universal access to reproductive health target is not optional!
- Advocate for Governments to include MDG 5b in their national MDG progress reports, including references to the challenges faced and their commitment to specific actions to achieve this target.
- Advocate for Governments to include mention of and concrete action steps to achieve MDG 5b in the Resolution of the MDG Summit in September.
- Encourage Ministers, Presidents, and Parliamentarians to highlight MDG 5b in speeches and statements at the MDG Summit in September.

