

Advocating for Maternal Health:
**A Checklist for Private Sector
Health Providers**

The Challenge

Maternal health remains an urgent public health challenge for the global community. Every day, nearly 800 women die due to complications of pregnancy and childbirth. Many of these deaths are preventable, and almost all complications can be treated if women have access to high-quality maternal health care. These deaths have a devastating effect on families and on society as a whole, because a woman's health is closely linked to the survival and well-being of her children, and to the economic productivity of communities.¹

The Role of the Private Sector

The private sector has a unique ability to provide solutions to address this global health challenge. The private health sector—which includes independent physicians, nurses, and midwives; traditional practitioners; private clinics and hospitals; pharmacies, health shops, and drug outlets; and health insurers—plays an important role in the provision of maternal health care, especially for the most marginalized populations. Private sector health providers also provide care in areas such as family planning, abortion services, and nutrition, which heavily affect maternal health.² In some countries in Africa, such as Uganda and Zambia, more than 60% of the population relies on the private sector for health care.³ Independent midwives, private clinics, and local pharmacies are trusted by the communities they serve, and are key partners in government efforts to improve maternal health.

Advocating for Maternal Health: Tips for Effective Advocacy

This checklist presents a set of tips and relevant resources and tools to help private-sector health professionals improve their knowledge, skills, and capacity to conduct advocacy in support of maternal health.

1

Build advocacy into your work schedule.

Effective advocacy is an ongoing process that takes time and dedicated effort. To achieve your advocacy goal and objectives (see Tip #2), you will need to incorporate advocacy as part of your daily or regular work routine. Advocacy cannot be a one-time or one-off occurrence.

2

Identify a specific issue and a concrete advocacy goal.

Focus on an issue that you know well or have direct experience with, and on identifying a specific goal or change that can give you a “quick win”—something that can be achieved in the short or medium term. A quick win can mean securing a meeting with a key decision maker, providing testimony at a parliamentary hearing, or successfully incorporating key messages in a policy maker's speech. Over time, these quick wins can provide a solid foundation for policy changes and for successful advocacy. Make sure your objectives include clear demands or policy asks.

3

Understand the political context and the political process.

The policy-making process is often complex. You will need to understand how decisions are made and the individuals and/or institutions who make those decisions. Consider:

- Who decides? Which individual or institution is responsible for the change you are advocating for?
- What is decided? What are the policy documents (laws, guidelines, budgets, curricula, and so on) that need to be implemented or updated?
- How are decisions made? What is the formal process, and who is involved?
- How are decisions enforced, implemented, and evaluated? What is the process for ensuring that policies are fully implemented and budgeted?⁶

Private Sector Health Providers: Advocates for Maternal Health

Health professionals, from both the private and public sectors, can serve as powerful advocates for maternal health in their countries: they can take action to address inefficiencies and gaps in the health system, and to improve environments and policies that shape their patients' behaviors and choices.⁴ Health professionals in many countries hold positions of influence, either as individuals or through national professional associations, and thus can serve as powerful voices for improving the quality and availability of maternal health care. Private sector health providers can:

- Engage national policy makers to prioritize investment in maternal health.
- Ensure clinical guidelines are evidence-based.
- Inform community leaders about the quality of maternal health care and mobilize them to take action.

What Is Advocacy?

Advocacy is evidence-based strategic action. Advocacy can build support for an issue and influence others to take action to achieve an intended change in policy or in public opinion. Advocacy can help to:

- Influence the enactment or revision of policies, guidelines, and other relevant policy documents that are based on the latest data and evidence.
- Inform decision makers about existing policies and their responsibility for implementing those policies.
- Ensure that sufficient financial resources are allocated for programs and services.
- Create support among community members and generate demand for supportive government policies.
- Mobilize grassroots support for an issue or problem and apply pressure on decision makers to take action.⁵

4

Establish and strengthen relationships with your key audience.

Relationships are key to effective advocacy; directly reaching out to your target audience or decision maker privately may be an ideal first approach. If you do not have a direct relationship with your target audience, identify others who have that connection. Working collaboratively with other advocates and partners can have greater impact than working alone (see Tip #6).

5

Keep it simple.

Know your audience and the messages that will best resonate with them. Keep the messages simple, clear, and to the point. Audiences are motivated by different facts—if you know your audience well, you will also know which facts will move them, and your messages will have the most impact. For example, for policy makers, an economic argument for investing in maternal health, and identifying cost-effective solutions, may be more likely to move them to take action.

6

Establish alliances and partnerships.

As a health professional, you can lend your expertise and influence to an existing maternal health focused partnership or coalition. In addition, maternal health affects other health and social sectors. Linking up with advocates from education, human rights, and other sectors has a number of advantages—you can expand your base of support and get more “people power” behind your advocacy goal.

7

Take advantage of upcoming policy windows and discussions.

Some of your greatest impact will come when audiences are already paying attention to maternal health issues. You do not necessarily have to carry out independently organized marches, rallies, or other community events to be effective or newsworthy. Find out if there are any key moments (e.g. elections, national or global holidays) in your government's policy cycle appropriate for advocacy on maternal health.

For More Information: Advocacy Tools and Resources

Promoting Health: Advocacy Guide for Health Professionals

http://www.whpa.org/ppe_advocacy_guide.pdf

The Advocacy Progress Planner: An Online Tool for Advocacy Planning and Evaluation

<http://planning.continuousprogress.org>

The Spitfire Strategies Smart Chart 3.0: An Even More Effective Tool to Help Nonprofits Make Smart Communications Choices

http://www.smartchart.org/content/smart_chart_3_0.pdf

Policy Advocacy for Health: A Workshop Curriculum on Policy Advocacy Strategy Development

<http://www.path.org/publications/detail.php?i=2274>

Straight to the Point—Advocacy

<http://www.pathfinder.org/publications-tools/publication-series/Straight-to-the-Point-Advocacy.html>

Making the Case for Midwifery: A Toolkit for Using Evidence from the State of the World's Midwifery 2014 Report to Create Policy Change at the Country Level

http://www.familycareintl.org/UserFiles/File/English_Toolkit_single_Final.pdf

Addressing the Health Workforce Crisis: A Toolkit for Health Professional Advocates

http://www.healthworkforce.info/advocacy/HWAI_advocacy_toolkit.pdf

Make a Case for Supplies, Leading Voices in Securing Reproductive Health Supplies: An Advocacy Guide and Toolkit

http://www.rhsupplies.org/fileadmin/user_upload/toolkit/Advocacy_Guide_and_Toolkit.pdf

Advocating Together: The Power of Alliances for Maternal Health

<http://www.familycareintl.org/UserFiles/File/AllianceToolkitFinal.pdf>

The content for this checklist was drawn from many sources, including the following key documents:

Health Workforce Advocacy Initiative, *Addressing the Health Workforce Crisis: A Toolkit for Health Professional Advocates*, Global Health Workforce Alliance/WHO website, http://www.healthworkforce.info/advocacy/HWAI_advocacy_toolkit.pdf.

International Council of Nurses (ICN), *Promoting Health: Advocacy Guide for Health Professionals* (Geneva, Switzerland: ICN, 2008), http://www.whpa.org/ppe_advocacy_guide.pdf.

Malaria Vaccine Initiative/PATH, *10 Tips for Successful Malaria Vaccine Advocacy* (Washington, D.C.: Malaria Vaccine Initiative/PATH, 2012), <http://www.malariavaccine.org/files/Advocacy-Booklet-FINAL-web.pdf>.

¹ Private Enterprise for Public Health, *Opportunities for Business to Improve Women's and Children's Health: A Short Guide for Companies* (Geneva, Switzerland: PMNCH, 2012).

² Madhavan, S., Bishai, D., Stanton, C., and Harding, A., *Engaging the Private Sector in Maternal and Neonatal Health in Low and Middle Income Countries*, FHS Working Paper 12, April 2010, http://r4d.dfid.gov.uk/PDF/Outputs/FutureHealth_RPC/WP12.pdf.

³ World Bank, *The Business of Health in Africa: Partnering with the Private Sector to Improve People's Lives*, International Finance Corporation (Washington, D.C.: World Bank, 2008), <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/2008/01/9526453/business-health-africa-partnering-private-sector-improve-peoples-lives>.

⁴ International Council of Nurses (ICN), *Promoting Health: Advocacy Guide for Health Professionals* (Geneva, Switzerland: ICN, 2008).

⁵ Family Care International, *Making the Case for Midwifery: A Toolkit for Using Evidence from the State of the World's Midwifery 2014 Report to Create Policy Change at the Country Level* (New York: Family Care International, 2014).

⁶ ICN, *Promoting Health*.

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