



Merck for Mothers in Asia Pacific

Responding to Local Maternal Health Needs in Communities Around the World

It all starts with a mother—she’s the beginning of a much bigger story. A healthy pregnancy and safe childbirth lead to a lifetime of benefits, both for her own health and prosperity as well as that of her children, family, community and nation—for generations to come. **We call this the “Mom Effect.”** Working with grantees and collaborators across sectors, we’re making the Mom Effect a reality for communities across the globe.



Regional Sites:
Australia; Cambodia;
China; Indonesia; Myanmar;
Philippines; Thailand; Vietnam

About Merck for Mothers

[Merck for Mothers](#) is Merck’s global initiative to help create a world where no woman has to die while giving life. Applying our Company’s business and scientific expertise, we are working to improve the health and well-being of women during pregnancy, childbirth and the months after. Our grantees and collaborators have reached over 30 million women in more than 70 countries around the world to support healthier pregnancies and safer childbirth, contributing to the global effort to help end maternal mortality and morbidity.

Estimated Maternal Mortality in the Asia Pacific Region

- **67 maternal deaths** per 100,000 live birthsⁱ
- In 2020, around **66,000 women died** due to complications related to pregnancy or childbirthⁱⁱ
- **40% reduction** in maternal mortality since 2000ⁱⁱⁱ
- **Challenges**^{iv,v}: Lack of infrastructure and access to essential services, disparities among Indigenous and ethnic minority populations, variations in quality of care



Programs and Collaborators in Asia Pacific

In 2012, we launched Merck for Mothers Global Grants — a corporate grant program that enables Merck offices to support organizations that are improving maternal health around the world beyond our Merck for Mothers focus countries India, Kenya, Nigeria and the United States. The Merck for Mothers Global Grants program is designed to be responsive to local women’s maternal health needs and extends our reach and impact to many more countries across the globe. Since we launched, the program has contributed over \$46 million, supporting over 85 projects across more than 45 global locations.

A selection of grants we have made in Asia Pacific includes:

Australia | The Australian College of Midwives developed a country framework for improving the quality of maternity care among Indigenous communities, aligned with the goals of the country’s National Maternity Services Plan. The framework addresses the need to reduce maternal health inequities among local Indigenous communities by training midwives to deliver integrated, holistic, culturally appropriate care to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities.

Cambodia | The Japanese Organization for International Cooperation in Family Planning (JOICFP) will work to improve access to quality maternal and child health (MCH) care and family planning services in Stung Treng Province, focusing on teenage girls and women from Indigenous and ethnic minority groups. The project will enhance the quality of MCH care and youth-friendly services at public health centers by strengthening the capacity of primary health care providers to deliver comprehensive care and providing telemedicine services. JOICFP will also train youth activists and village health support groups to deliver sexual and reproductive health information using social and behavioral change communication interventions.

Cambodia | World Vision enhanced maternal and child health knowledge and practices by training mothers to prevent and manage common childhood illnesses and delivering information on how to improve their nutrition and overall health.

China | Project HOPE deployed digital health solutions to screen, assess and manage women’s health risks during pregnancy. The project helped women and health workers with early identification, early alert and early intervention for pregnancy-related risks in areas with high rates of maternal mortality rates in Eastern China.

China | Project HOPE increased access to maternal health services for pregnant women with risk factors – including advanced maternal age – to reduce the chances of a childbirth emergency. The organization strengthened clinical practice among health care providers, enhancing both routine and emergency care at health facilities in areas of Western China that have high rates of maternal morbidity and mortality.

Chinese Taipei | The Zhi-shan Foundation increased access to quality, comprehensive maternal health care and social support services for Indigenous women living in remote areas. To address geographic access barriers, the organization deployed a mobile health van as well as trained and built a community network of qualified health and social welfare practitioners and local caregivers.

Indonesia | Project HOPE will focus on strengthening the capacity of health care providers to improve the quality and timeliness of emergency obstetric services at primary health facilities, particularly in rural areas where delays in life-saving treatment are common. The project also plans to roll out their Safe Delivery digital application, a mobile health tool to enhance antenatal care and emergency obstetric care, which will enhance emergency care protocols and equip frontline health workers with critical knowledge and skills.



Indonesia | Jhpiego examined the factors that prevent or enable women to access the full range of family planning methods immediately after pregnancy. The study informed the design and implementation of a package of interventions to improve the quality of family planning counseling and services in both the public and private health sectors.

Myanmar | The Japanese Organization for International Cooperation in Family Planning is helping women overcome socio-cultural barriers in accessing family planning and maternal health services in the Ayeyarwady Region.

Philippines | Jhpiego is improving the quality of maternity care in public and private health facilities in the Bicol Region of Sorsogon Province and establishing a referral network to ensure timely response to obstetric emergencies.

Thailand | UNICEF reduced the risks of maternal morbidity and mortality among 15-19-year-olds by increasing access to youth-friendly health services before, during and after childbirth. The organization promoted digital forums and online platforms for adolescents to receive age-appropriate information, services and counseling on sexual and reproductive health, with the goal of preventing unintended pregnancies.

Vietnam | Population Services International broadened contraceptive options for Vietnamese women and their partners living in underserved communities by registering previously unavailable contraceptives. The program also incorporated family planning counselling into antenatal and post-pregnancy care and educated women on the full range of contraceptive options – enabling them to choose an appropriate method based on their individual needs and preferences.

Vietnam | UNFPA is helping women from ethnic minority communities overcome cultural, educational and behavioral barriers to using maternal health and family planning services. The organization’s interventions include community education, building health professionals’ capacity to provide emergency obstetric care, and developing an internet-based smart phone application to improve the delivery of maternal health and family planning services.



Project Spotlight

Philippines | Merck for Mothers joined the UN Foundation and UNFPA to launch Business Action for Family Planning (BAFP) – a partnership with business owners in the Philippines to provide maternal and reproductive health information to underserved women at the workplace. BAFP partnered with 11 private Filipino companies to implement the program, reaching 1.2 +million women with comprehensive family planning information and services. These efforts resulted in an 18% decline in absenteeism and a 43% reduction in staff turnover—yielding a 4:1 return on investment.^{vi} This work led to the development of a return of investment tool, which UNFPA is using to make the business case for other companies to invest in workplace health programs.

i. OECD/WHO. (2022). [Health at a Glance: Asia/Pacific 2022: Measuring Progress Towards Universal Health Coverage](#).

ii. UNFPA. (2024). [Maternal health](#).

iii. OECD/WHO. (2022). [Health at a Glance: Asia/Pacific 2022: Measuring Progress Towards Universal Health Coverage](#).

iv. Wulandari, Ratna et al.(2021). [Urban-rural disparities of antenatal care in South East Asia: a case study in the Philippines and Indonesia](#).

v. UNFPA. (2024). [Maternal health](#).

vi. Internal semi-annual progress report: Business Action for Family Planning (February 2021 - February 2024)