



# ADDRESSING STOCKOUTS

Stockouts are woven into the fabric of everyday life across the Global South. Shortages in commodities such as rice and sugar, for example, are unremarkable in their frequency and ubiquity. Hardened by the everyday reality of such stockouts, many communities have become indifferent to shortages of critical commodities such as lifesaving medicines. It is not uncommon for a woman to walk an entire day over bush land, seeking access to the implant or pills that will prevent pregnancy, improve her family's quality of life, and potentially even save her life. But all too often, she arrives at the clinic only to see that the shelves are bare, before starting on her journey homeward empty-handed, knowing how much more at risk her life has just become.

Stockouts are a problem that has confounded experts not just because of the underlying complexity of the issue, but because the indignation of key stakeholders all too often succumbs, over time, to the same forces that make stockouts an everyday occurrence – limited or unsustainable resources, indifference, and competing concerns. The Reproductive Health Supplies Coalition is embarking on a new journey that begins with winning the hearts and minds of those who can make a real difference, getting its partners around the world speaking the same language and leveraging public support to institutionalize tried and tested supply chain models.

## What's involved in the fight against stockouts?

- Harnessing the passion. Central to this fight is generating the outrage and political will needed to meaningfully mobilize action around this critical issue. The Coalition is looking to harness that passion and vision, channeling them into the development and application of appropriate tools and processes.
- Establishing an evidence base. Any good advocacy effort draws from a solid evidence base. The Coalition will take pains to document the impact of stockouts on individual health outcomes and health systems.
- Forging a common understanding. Stockouts cannot be wiped out by a technical fix alone. The Coalition will link technical experts with researchers and advocates to forge a common understanding of the issue, and identify actions; in other words, the Coalition will seek to convene the multisectoral base needed to address the multidimensional nature of stockouts.
- Speaking the same language. There is no single, standard way of measuring stockouts at present. Different agencies employ their own methods and indicators. This has exacerbated confusion and

a measure of disconnect in the community. The Coalition will help bring some level of alignment and harmonization in which stockouts are measured, and get everyone speaking the same language.

- Identifying best practices. Best practices, in this particularly stark landscape, are invaluable. The Coalition will tap the richness and diversity of its membership, as well as the lessons from other ongoing efforts, in order to address stockouts.

### What will the Coalition deliver?

- A consensus definition of stockouts to assess the frequency and magnitude of stockouts.
- Greater media attention on stockouts, especially among the world's poorest countries with GDPs of US\$2,500 or less.
- Interventions that dramatically reduce the frequency, duration, and number of methods stocked out.
- National-level policy changes to avert stockouts in pilot countries.
- Sharing of lessons and experience.

## Why is the Coalition uniquely positioned to do this successfully?

### Neutral convener; time-tested partnerships

The Coalition is best placed, with its ever-growing membership, to convene the multi-sectoral base needed to address the multidimensional nature of stockouts. The task at hand calls for an unbiased convening space, one in which all members and commodities are equal. The Coalition's partnerships are time-tested and build on the strength of familiar, trusted relationships. This has provided a secure backdrop from which to push the frontiers of innovation, attract commitments, and honour promises.

## Coalition tools and resources <sup>1</sup>

The Coalition has long leveraged its partnerships to put in place the tools and resources needed to overcome barriers that threaten commodity security. These efforts represent the foundations of a new initiative that will be brought to bear in the years ahead to confront stockouts. These highly relevant and effective tools have stood the Coalition in good stead, reinforcing its position as an authority on reproductive health supplies.

- AccessRH offers access to a wide range of quality, affordable RH products, and up-to-date information on more than US \$1.6 billion of global contraceptive orders. This public site allows health ministries, NGOs, advocates and donors to access critical information for RH decision-making and monitoring of current shipments.
- The RHInterchange offers up-to-date, harmonized data on more than US\$1 billion worth of shipments of contraceptive supplies for more than 140 countries around the world. This data is provided by pharmaceutical companies and partner agencies.
- The Coordinated Assistance for RH supplies (CARhs) group brings together representatives of the world's key commodity suppliers to address the short-term supply crises that periodically befall countries. At its monthly meetings, the group identifies pending supply shortages, tries to understand their cause, develops solutions, and if possible, applies them.
- The Procurement Planning and Monitoring Report (PPMR) is a monthly report that describes the stock status of contraceptives in 26 countries on a monthly and quarterly basis. The PPMR serves as a catalyst for action – providing the critical information needed to prevent or mitigate stockouts.
- LAPTOP is an information clearinghouse on professional development opportunities for health commodity managers in developing countries. The courses have the potential to result in more professional management of public sector supply chains and therefore in improved product availability in country.

*For more information, please write to [secretariat@rhsupplies.org](mailto:secretariat@rhsupplies.org).*

<sup>1</sup> All these tools and resources can be accessed from the Coalition's website at <http://www.rhsupplies.org/resources-tools.html>

## The Reproductive Health Supplies Coalition

The Coalition is a global partnership of public, private, and non-governmental organizations dedicated to ensuring that everyone in low- and middle-income countries can access and use affordable, high-quality supplies for their better reproductive health. It brings together agencies and groups with critical roles in providing contraceptives and other reproductive health supplies. These include multilateral and bilateral organizations, private foundations, governments, civil society, and private-sector representatives. The Coalition Secretariat is managed by PATH, an international, nonprofit organization that improves the health of people around the world.

### Secretariat

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