

Reproductive Health Supplies Coalition Update

This brief newsletter provides updates on the RHSC Secretariat, the Working Groups' activities, and plans for the Spring 2006 RHSC meeting that will take place in New York City, in April.

RHSC Secretariat

In February, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation awarded a grant to PATH to support the RHSC Secretariat over the next three years as it makes a transition to a sustainable entity that can provide greater support to the Coalition and help it achieve its priorities. PATH currently is working with the Search Committee (a subcommittee of the Executive Committee) to fill the position of RHSC Director. The position was posted in December on 12 websites: Emory Rollins School of Public Health, Global Health Council, DevNetJobs, Johns Hopkins School of Public Health, Share-Net Weekly, Associate of Reproductive Health Professionals, FIGO, Development Gateway, ELDIS, Funders Network on Population, Reproductive Health and Rights, and PublicHealth Jobs Worldwide. In addition, the job description was sent to all RHSC members with a request to share it among their networks. This resulted in more than 60 expressions of interest. The Search Committee expects to be able to fill the position by April. The next steps will be to establish an office for the RHSC Secretariat in Brussels and hire a Program Officer and office staff. The three-year timeframe will enable the Secretariat to develop and implement a plan for the long-term future and sustainability of the Coalition.

Market Development Approaches (MDA) Working Group

MDA WG Leader: Ben Light

The MDA and its subgroup on generics had constructive, collaborative meetings in London January 25, 26, 27. More than 20 people participated in all, including members of the SSWG. The MDA is making progress and moving toward agreement on what it wants to accomplish. The presentations and discussion at the January meeting included:

- IPPF's second tier market research.
- Development of country topology for identifying countries in which a market development approach has the greatest likelihood of success.

- Overview of market approaches and lessons learned, commissioned by the working group.
- Progress on WHO prequalification for reproductive health medicines, and WHO's draft list of priority medicines for prequalification.
- Relationship of the MDA working group with other working groups, specifically, linkages and complimentary areas of interest /work.
- Effective reporting and communication to the RHSC

The Supply Systems Working Group (SSWG)

SSWG Leader: Alan Bornbusch

The SSWG had a fruitful meeting on January 20 in New York, hosted by UNPFA. The group reviewed their 2006-08 work plan, concentrating on 2006 activities. Lead individuals gave progress reports and the group advised on next steps for each activity. Discussion points included:

- Clarification of the SSWG's role vis-à-vis strengthening country LMIS.
- Building country capacity for procurement as an emergent priority; identification of some priority actions in this area.
- Continued development of metrics for the CAR group and indicators for SSWG objectives.
- Financing as a cross-cutting issue. The SSWG has "commissioned" two studies, funded by the Gates Foundation and KfW, to develop design options for alternative mechanisms that will make more efficient use of resources to finance RH supplies and mobilize new resources. The RMA will identify representatives to join the advisory groups for these studies.

The Resource Mobilization and Awareness (RMA) Working Group

RMA WG Chief Advocate: Terri Bartlett, and after April 2006 Susan Rich

Upcoming RMA Meeting: The RMA working group decided to wait until after the January

meetings of the other two working groups to better identify key advocacy issues. They will meet March 19-20 at the Supply Initiative office in Brussels, Belgium. During the meeting they plan to:

- Develop a recommendation for civil society representation to the RHS Coalition.
- Respond to linkages to and requests from the other two working groups—for example, review of the results of the financing mechanisms research of the SSWG.
- Discuss membership in and leadership of the RMA.
- Plan and update the activities in the RMA workplan.

Roundtable Meeting on Supplies In Brussels: Margret Verwijk, Wolfgang Bichmann, and Lena Sund gave presentations at a Roundtable Meeting for EU MEPs (Members of European Parliament) and Embassy representatives of the ACP Alliance (Africa, Caribbean and Pacific) on the Reproductive Health Supplies Coalition and on the EC's supplies research. The Roundtable, the third such roundtable meeting in four years on the topic of supplies, was entitled "How Can the EU Address the Reproductive Health Supply Shortage?" and was organized by Marie Stopes International/Brussels. In addition to the RHSC Co-Chairs, Ben Light also presented on UNFPA's Global Programme to Enhance Reproductive Health Commodity Security 2006-2010 and Carolyn Vogel and Mercedes Mas de Xaxas of PAI/Supply Initiative also attended as respondents.

East Africa Reproductive Health Contraceptive Security Workshop: Ensuring Access to Family Planning. RMA Working Group members, DSW, JSI/DELIVER, KfW and USAID collaborated on a meeting in Tanzania on contraceptive security that gathered key stakeholders to respond to priority issues affecting access to reproductive health supplies in the region. Held in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, on 15-18 November and partially funded by the Supply Initiative, the meeting:

- Provided a forum for the exchange of issues, obstacles, and viable approaches to increasing reproductive health contraceptive security (RHCS).
- Identified ways to increase support for RHCS.

- Improved mutual understanding of donors and countries of the challenges each face in responding to RHCS needs.
- Identified concrete country-level strategies for moving forward.

Supply Initiative Finalizes a new Factsheet on Reproductive Health Supplies and PRSPs and other Financing Mechanisms: *Why Reproductive Health Supplies are Crucial to Poverty Reduction* reviews the presence of RH and RH supplies in PRSPs, and discusses supplies in the context of funding mechanisms such as SWAPs, CSPs, general or sector budget support, PEPFAR and the Global Fund. The printed version will be available soon and will be posted on the SI website at <http://www.rhsupplies.org/>

PAI and the Supplies Bill: PAI was instrumental in the introduction of a contraceptive supplies bill in the US Congress. "The Ensuring Access to Contraceptives Act of 2006" (H.R. 4736), introduced in the House of Representatives on February 8, exempts nongovernmental family planning providers from the restrictions of the Global Gag Rule/Mexico City Policy with respect to USAID-donated contraceptives and condoms. The same eligibility criteria for receiving USAID-funded reproductive health supplies that is currently applied to foreign governments would be applied to NGOs. The bill also authorizes an additional \$150 million annually for FY 2006-2007 for USAID to provide a reliable and sustainable supply of modern contraceptives and condoms in developing nations. This funding level is double the current amount spent by USAID on contraceptives. A companion bill is expected to be introduced in the Senate in the coming weeks.

RHSC Meeting in New York in April

The next meeting of the RHSC will be hosted by UNFPA and take place at the UNFPA offices in New York City April 27-28, 2006. A block of hotel rooms has been reserved until April 4 at the Crowne Plaza United Nations hotel, a short distance from UNFPA. Thoraya Obaid will speak at the opening and the closing, and UNFPA will host a reception at the hotel on April 27. The invitations and accompanying information about the meeting logistics will be sent to RHSC members at the end of February.