

The Supply Initiative: Meeting the Need for Reproductive Health Supplies

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The Supply Initiative

The Supply Initiative is a newly established global focal point for supply issues related to sexual and reproductive health services. Its key activities are to establish the RHInterchange, a web-based tool to coordinate efficient procurement and exchange vital information; to mobilize resources and raise awareness and commitment among donor country governments; to establish a forum for improved coordination among donors; and to set up a global communication network for the reproductive health supply issue. Based in Brussels, the Initiative currently comprises a group of lead implementation partners¹ and the Advocacy Working Group (AWG)². A Forum of Supply Donors³ facilitates the effectiveness of the RHInterchange and a Strategy Committee helps guide the direction of the Initiative.

The Supply Initiative's action plan represents a departure from past work on the supply of reproductive health services. It brings diverse partners together to build on their accomplishments and maximize their synergies. In the first phase of work, focus is being placed on coordination among donors, resource mobilization, and global awareness.

The Supply Challenge

A growing shortfall in the availability of the supplies needed to maintain good sexual and reproductive health is threatening the well-being of men and women in the developing world. Reproductive health programs worldwide confront a growing crisis as a result of a lack of supplies that are needed for HIV/AIDS prevention, contraception and other vital sexual and reproductive health care services. The gap between the need for donated supplies and the funding available for purchasing them is projected to reach hundreds of millions of dollars by 2015.

The developing world has achieved significant increases in the use of reproductive health services, but non-governmental organizations, private sector initiatives, and public sector providers currently lack the resources to fully meet needs. Already under-funded reproductive health programs risk continued supply shortfalls due to waning donor commitment – the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) estimates that donor participation has dropped from historically supporting 40% of total supply costs to less than 30% today. Moreover, insufficient coordination mechanisms at the global and national levels, and inadequate logistics capacity in developing countries further limit people's access to the supplies they need.

The Supply Initiative is an important next step toward helping developing countries meet their long-term sexual and reproductive health supply needs.

Global Consensus on Reproductive and Sexual Health Needs

The Millennium Development Goals, to which the international development community has committed itself, include three aggressive health targets to be achieved by 2015: reduce infant and child mortality by two-thirds, lower maternal mortality by three-quarters, and stop and begin to reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS. These represent an important recommitment to the goals of the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) and again at ICPD+5 in 1999. Despite these commitments, efforts by both donor and recipient countries to keep up with the needs and demand for sexual and reproductive health services have been insufficient.

Awareness of the reproductive and sexual health supply crisis and understanding of its implications for the future, as well as a desire for urgent action, are growing. Leaders of UN agencies, developing country delegations, representatives of non-governmental organizations, private and public funders, and technical agencies met in May 2001 in Istanbul, Turkey for a conference entitled, "Meeting the Reproductive Health Challenge: Securing Contraceptives, and Condoms for HIV/AIDS Prevention." The event, organized by the Interim Working Group (IWG)⁴, served to deepen awareness, engage critical stakeholders and define key areas and mechanisms for implementing an action agenda.

The Initiative is grateful for the continued support provided by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, the David and Lucile Packard Foundation, the United Nations Foundation/Better World Fund and the Wallace Global Fund. In addition, major bilateral and multilateral agencies such as USAID and UNFPA have expressed strong support for the issue and continue to be very active.

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Footnotes:

¹The lead partners for implementation of the Initiative currently include German Foundation for World Population (DSW); JSI Research and Training Institute, Inc. (JSI); Population Action International (PAI); Program for Appropriate Technology in Health (PATH); and the European Center for Population and Development (ECPD).

²The members of the AWG include: Population Action International (Chair), International Council on Management of Population Programmes (ICOMP), German Foundation for World Population (DSW), Planned Parenthood Federation of America's Global Partners program, Marie Stopes International (MSI), IPPF/Africa Region, Partners in Population and Development and the Latin American and Caribbean Women's Health Network.

³The Forum includes major supply donors such as UNFPA, USAID and IPPF.

⁴The IWG was a collaborative effort of Population Action International, John Snow, Inc., Program for Appropriate Technology in Health and the Wallace Global Fund.

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