



How USAID Budget Cuts Threaten Global Health System

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The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) has been a cornerstone of global health development for decades. Established in 1961, USAID's mission has been to advance international development and humanitarian assistance, with health systems being a core area of focus. Through its funding and programmatic efforts, USAID has played a pivotal role in combating infectious diseases, improving maternal and child health, and strengthening health systems in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) (USAID, 2021). However, recent decisions to reduce USAID funding raise critical concerns about the future of global health, jeopardizing progress made toward Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and other global health targets.

The Trump administration's funding policies toward USAID have brought additional scrutiny. Notably, the administration implemented significant budget cuts that disrupted numerous international development projects. For instance, in February 2025, a funding freeze halted humanitarian aid globally, leading to legal challenges and a temporary lift ordered by a federal judge (AP News, 2025). Additionally, critical Australian-funded projects addressing climate, health, and education in the Indo-Pacific region were jeopardized due to these cuts (The Guardian, 2025). Women's development programs also faced severe setbacks; threatening millions of dollars earmarked for gender equality efforts (CBS News, 2025). Contractors working with USAID filed lawsuits as funding halts disrupted operations worth hundreds of millions of dollars (Reuters, 2025). These incidents underscore the tangible challenges created by policy changes and funding reductions.

USAID'S CONTRIBUTIONS TO GLOBAL HEALTH

USAID's contributions to global health have been transformative, particularly in the following areas:

- Infectious Disease Control:** USAID has been instrumental in fighting infectious diseases such as HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, and malaria. Through initiatives like the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) and the President's Malaria Initiative (PMI), USAID funding has saved millions of lives and reduced disease burden globally (CDC, 2022; PMI, 2022).
- Maternal and Child Health:** USAID programs have significantly improved maternal and child health outcomes by increasing access to prenatal care, skilled birth attendance, and vaccination campaigns. The agency's work has contributed to declines in maternal and under-five mortality rates in many countries (Bhutta et al., 2021).
- Health Systems Strengthening:** USAID has supported the development of resilient health systems by providing technical assistance, training health workers, and improving supply chain systems for essential medicines and equipment. This has enhanced the capacity of LMICs to respond to health emergencies (USAID, 2020).

4. **Global Health Security:** USAID has played a vital role in preventing and responding to global health threats such as Ebola and COVID-19. By investing in early warning systems and capacity-building, the agency has helped mitigate the spread of diseases across borders (Katz et al., 2020).

THREATS TO THE GLOBAL HEALTH SYSTEM

The reduction of USAID funding poses significant threats to global health systems and progress:

1. **Disruption of Critical Health Programs:** Cuts to USAID funding will disrupt ongoing programs, including vaccination campaigns, HIV treatment, and malaria prevention initiatives. These disruptions could lead to the resurgence of preventable diseases and increased mortality rates.
2. **Weakening of Health Systems in LMICs:** Many health systems in LMICs rely heavily on USAID support for workforce training, infrastructure development, and supply chains. Funding cuts could lead to a decline in the quality and availability of healthcare services.
3. **Increased Health Inequities:** Vulnerable populations, including women, children, and marginalized communities, will be disproportionately affected by reduced funding, exacerbating existing health inequities.
4. **Global Health Security Risks:** Reduced investment in global health security could undermine the ability to detect and respond to emerging health threats, increasing the risk of pandemics.

THREATS TO THE GLOBAL HEALTH SYSTEM

While the reduction in USAID funding presents significant challenges, alternative solutions can mitigate its impact:

1. **Diversification of Funding Sources:** LMICs can explore alternative funding sources, including bilateral agreements, private sector partnerships, and philanthropic contributions, to sustain health programs (Schmidt-Traub & Sachs, 2020).
2. **Strengthening Domestic Resources:** Governments in recipient countries should prioritize health in their budgets and increase domestic investment in health systems. This includes improving tax systems and reducing inefficiencies in healthcare spending (
3. **Enhanced Collaboration with Multilateral Organizations:** Collaboration with multilateral organizations like the World Health Organization (WHO), the Global Fund, and Gavi can help fill gaps left by USAID funding cuts
4. **Focus on Cost-Effective Interventions:** Scaling up cost-effective and community-based interventions, such as task-shifting to community health workers, can maintain service delivery at reduced costs
5. **Advocacy for Policy Reversal:** Advocacy efforts targeting policymakers in the U.S. could highlight the long-term consequences of USAID funding cuts, potentially leading to the restoration of funds.

USAID's contributions to global health have been unparalleled, driving progress in infectious disease control, maternal and child health, and health systems strengthening. However, the decision to reduce USAID funding poses significant risks to global health systems, threatening to undo decades of progress. To mitigate these impacts, global stakeholders must act swiftly to identify alternative funding mechanisms, strengthen domestic health systems, and advocate for the restoration of USAID's critical health programs. Maintaining momentum toward global health goals requires collective action

and unwavering commitment from all sectors.

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