



Merck for Mothers in Kenya

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.”

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. Our grantees and collaborators have reached more than 13 million women in nearly 50 sites around the world with programs to support healthier pregnancies and safer childbirths, contributing to the global effort to help end maternal mortality and morbidity. Applying Merck’s business and scientific resources, we are working across sectors to improve the health and well-being of women during pregnancy, childbirth and the months after.

Our Approach in Kenya

Over the last decade, progress towards reducing maternal mortality in Kenya has not been straightforward. While estimates of the recent rate of maternal mortality reduction vary, it is clear that Kenya has one of the highest numbers of annual maternal deaths in the world and will need to accelerate its pace of maternal mortality reduction in order to meet the maternal health sustainable development goal by 2030^{1,2}. The Government of Kenya is developing policies and financing schemes that ensure women have access to quality and affordable maternal health care services, including a commitment to achieving Universal Health Coverage by 2022^{3,4}.

Since 2013, Merck for Mothers has prioritized maternal health innovation at the center of Kenya’s development strategy. The widespread availability and utilization of digital technology, paired with a strong national health insurance program, makes Kenya an ideal location for groundbreaking digital solutions that can help reduce maternal mortality in Kenya and beyond. Merck for Mothers works with a diverse group of collaborators, including governments, non-profit organizations, quality improvement experts, advocates and other innovators to help end preventable maternal mortality in Kenya. We follow core principles that are true to our values: taking women-centered approaches, expanding access to quality care using the power of digital technologies and strengthening health systems by using transparent and measurable data for decision making and understanding health outcomes.

Our Focus Areas



Advancing Women's Maternity Care Experiences

Increasing awareness and access to patient-driven, quality care

Women often do not have the information they need to make informed decisions about their reproductive health. In response, we have supported the development and deployment of askNivi — an artificial intelligence (AI)-enabled chatbot that educates people about a range of reproductive health topics including available contraceptive methods to meet a woman's needs and then connects her with a quality provider who has her chosen method in stock. Since the launch of [askNivi](#) in Kenya in 2017, the AI-enabled chatbot has been learning continuously based on information from over 330,000 users in Kenya — so that people receive more individualized information along their health journeys.

Collaborator: Nivi

Amplifying women's voices to understand and meet their health care demands

Expanding availability and affordability of care without improving quality will not improve population health. Patient demand is a key element that drives the sustainable delivery of quality health care. Merck for Mothers supported the White Ribbon Alliance through their What Women Want campaign — a global advocacy campaign to improve quality maternal and reproductive health care for women and girls and strengthen health systems. Launched in April of 2018, the campaign queried 1 million women and girls worldwide including in Kenya, from capital cities to rural villages, about their top priority for quality maternal and reproductive health services. The What Women Want campaign plans to grow the global movement for quality health care for women and girls, while also helping governments, health professional, private providers and civil society organizations better understand what is most important to women when it comes to their health care.

Collaborator: White Ribbon Alliance



Mobilizing resources for local businesses supporting maternal health

The MOMs (Maternal Outcomes Matter) Initiative, launched in June 2019⁵, committed up to \$50M in blended financing to improve maternal health in regions of the world where there are high rates of women dying from complications of pregnancy and childbirth. In many countries with poor health outcomes, small and medium-sized enterprises and entrepreneurs are an untapped resource for innovation that can accelerate gains in health using financially sustainable business models. Through the MOMs Initiative, Merck for Mothers is investing in health businesses in Kenya that are well-equipped to improve maternal health in a financially sustainable way. The first MOMs investments in Kenya are addressing the availability and transport of quality blood and oxygen (LifeBank) and the development of a data-driven labor and delivery referral system (Penda Health).

Collaborators: Development Finance Corporation (DFC), United States Agency for International Development (USAID), Credit Suisse, LifeBank, Penda Health



Improving the Quality of Maternity Care

Digital support for safe deliveries

Health care providers face daily challenges offering critical maternity care, including limited decision-making support and lack of data to guide quality improvement efforts. Since 2017, Merck for Mothers has supported the development and scale of iDeliver, a clinical decision-making support tool for providers to more effectively triage and manage maternity care. The platform was developed using human-centered design to address providers' specific needs and challenges and supports real-time use by providers before, during and immediately following birth. Routine data analytics and feedback helps providers diagnose and monitor patients.

Collaborators: Vecna Cares, Johns Hopkins University, Scope

Integrating post-pregnancy family planning services into maternal health care

Although family planning is one of the most effective ways to reduce maternal mortality globally, only half of married women in Kenya are using a modern method⁶ of contraception.⁷ To help expand access to family planning, we are supporting the Post-Partum Family Planning Choices program to integrate post-pregnancy family planning services along the continuum of maternity care — during antenatal, delivery and postnatal visit — in public and private facilities in Meru and Kilifi counties. This project also aims to generate evidence to advance learning around the provision, uptake and continuation of the full range of contraceptive options offered in the immediate post-pregnancy period and up to 1 year after.

Collaborators: Jhpiego, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation



Strengthening Integrated Approaches to Sustain High Quality Maternity Care

Supporting women's pregnancy journey through improved financing and high quality care

We know that completing the full continuum of maternal health care helps assure a healthy pregnancy and safe delivery — yet less than 60 percent of women in Kenya receive four or more antenatal care visits.⁸ Merck for Mothers is supporting the development and scale of MomCare, a digital platform that helps a woman track and complete her maternal health journey, provide feedback on the care she receives and pay for quality care offered by accredited providers. Providers also use the platform to track their patients' care, improve the quality of care they offer and increase the speed of receiving payments. To drive value-based care, payers use the platform to access real-time insights on the costs, utilization and outcomes of the maternal health journey.

Collaborators: PharmAccess Foundation, M-Tiba, CarePay, SafeCare

Reducing the burden of postpartum hemorrhage

Postpartum hemorrhage (PPH) is a leading cause of maternal morbidity and mortality worldwide, with the highest incidence in low- and middle-income countries like Kenya. In Kenya, we are investing in the design and implementation of PPH prevention as part of a multi-country initiative — Smiles for Mothers: Making Deliveries Safer. The project aims to increase access to quality uterotonics by helping ten counties adopt the [WHO recommendations on uterotonics for PPH prevention](#) and introducing innovations to strengthen the health system's ability to respond to, prevent and manage PPH⁹.

Collaborators: Jhpiego Kenya, HealthStrat, McKinsey & Company

Leveraging Strategic Partnership Platforms

Merck for Mothers is leveraging strategic platforms which convene multisectoral partners to address maternal health in Kenya. In 2017, we became the first private sector investor in the Global Financing Facility (GFF) — a multi-stakeholder global partnership housed at the World Bank that is committed to ensuring all women, children and adolescents can survive and thrive. Through our investment and membership in the GFF Investors Group, Merck for Mothers is helping the GFF to integrate the private sector more systematically and to lean on the private sector around innovation. Merck for Mothers also was an early partner in Kenya's SDG Partnership Platform which convenes a range of partners from Government to the United Nations to development partners and the private sector — all mobilized to accelerate progress on the Sustainable Development Goals. The Platform is unlocking private-public collaborations and investments around strategically selected initiatives that have potential for impact and support the Government of Kenya's Universal Health Coverage agenda.

Collaborators: Global Financing Facility, United Nations, Government of Kenya

¹ Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation (IHME). Maternal Health Atlas. Seattle, WA: IHME, University of Washington, 2018. Available from <https://maternalhealthatlas.org/>. (Accessed November 2020)

² Trends in maternal mortality 2000 to 2017: estimates by WHO, UNICEF, UNFPA, World Bank Group and the United Nations Population Division. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2019. License: CCBY-NC-SA 3.0 IGO.

³ Health Policy Watch. (2018). Kenyan President Launches Benchmark Universal Health Coverage Pilot, To Become Nationwide In 18 Months. Available from <https://healthpolicy-watch.news/kenyan-president-launches-benchmark-universal-health-coverage-pilot-to-become-nationwide-in-18-months/>. (Accessed February 2021).

⁴ Masaba, Brian Barasa and Mmusi-Phetoe, Rose M. Free Maternal Health Care Policy in Kenya; Level of Utilization and Barriers. International Journal of Africa Nursing Sciences, Volume 13, 2020.

⁵ <https://www.dfc.gov/media/opic-press-releases/opic-announces-collaboration-usaid-merck-and-credit-suisse-improve>

⁶ As defined by the World Health Organization, modern methods of contraception include: oral contraceptive pills, implants, injectables, contraceptive patch and vaginal ring, intrauterine device (IDU), female and male condoms, female and male sterilization, vaginal barrier methods (including the diaphragm, cervical cap and spermicidal agents), lactational amenorrhea method (LAM), emergency contraception pills, standard days method (SDM), basal body temperature (BBT) method, TwoDay method and sympto-thermal method.

⁷ Kenya National Bureau of Statistics. (2015). Kenya Demographic and Health Survey 2014.

⁸ Kenya National Bureau of Statistics. (2015). Kenya Demographic and Health Survey 2014.

⁹ World Health Organization. (2018). WHO recommendations: Uterotonics for the prevention of postpartum hemorrhage. Available from <https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/277276/9789241550420-eng.pdf?ua=1>. (Accessed November 2020)

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