

# MEDIA RELEASE

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## **The impact of defunding health programs in developing countries can be counted in human costs**

The withdrawal of US funding from health programs in developing countries will result in the unnecessary deaths of thousands of women and stretch fledgling health systems to breaking point. Australian Family Planning organisations (listed below) acknowledge the enviable position Australia has in having bipartisan support for equitable access to the highest standard of sexual and reproductive health services.

The removal of US Aid serves as a cautionary tale reminding us that women's reproductive rights, in both our domestic and foreign policy, cannot be taken for granted. We stand shoulder-to-shoulder with international partner organisations who will feel the devastating effects of this shift in US policy.

Every year, worldwide, about 42 million women with unintended pregnancies choose abortion, and nearly half of these procedures, 20 million, are unsafe [1]. Without US Aid the number of unintended pregnancies and unsafe abortions in developing countries will significantly increase resulting in additional death and disability.

A spokesperson for Marie Stopes International estimates that this policy shift is likely to have devastating impacts over the next three years in developing countries like Cambodia and Nepal [2]. In Cambodia alone there is likely to be nearly 12,000 unintended pregnancies, 6,600 abortions and an additional 5,100 unsafe abortions.

Associate Professor Elizabeth Hoban who has been conducting sexual and reproductive health research in Cambodia for over 20 years has seen the impact of this decision first hand. She states:

“The major US Aid funded services of Marie Stopes and Population Council are closing down and women will be forced to seek over the counter medical abortion. This will lead to increased deaths from misuse of the medication and from lack of medical support. The real tragedy of this policy is that the health systems in developing countries such as Cambodia were just beginning to progress and deliver a high standard of sexual and reproductive health care and this decision will set them back significantly.”

Over the last decade there has been substantial progress in advancing the reproductive rights of women with many countries increasing funding for family planning and increasing access to safe and timely abortion. The withdrawal of critical US funds will reverse decades of progress in reproductive and maternal health and increase unintended pregnancies and unsafe abortions.

1. Haddad, L.B. and N.M. Nour, *Unsafe Abortion: Unnecessary Maternal Mortality*. Reviews in Obstetrics and Gynecology, 2009. **2**(2): p. 122-126.
2. Jaklina, M., A. Tracy, and O. Rajna, *Development of a Translation Standard to support the improvement of health literacy and provide consistent high-quality information*. Australian Health Review, 2013. **37**(4): p. 547-551.



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Family Planning Victoria is a leader in sexual and reproductive health care, education and advocacy. Our vision is to improve reproductive & sexual health and wellbeing for everyone in Victoria and beyond.

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