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Global Health and the Future Role of the United States

The United States has long been a leader in global health. Yet resources are not unlimited, and the case for continued commitment must be made. Against the backdrop of the influential legacy of the United States on the global health stage, the new administration is now faced with the choice of whether or not to ensure that gains in global health—won with billions of U.S. dollars, years of dedication, and strong programs—are sustained and poised for further growth.

With support from a broad array of federal agencies, foundations, and private partners, the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine convened an ad hoc committee to identify global health priorities in light of current and emerging global health threats and challenges. In the resulting report, *Global Health and the Future Role of the United States*, the committee provides recommendations to the U.S. government and other stakeholders for increasing responsiveness, coordination, and efficiency in addressing these threats and challenges by establishing priorities and mobilizing resources.

CONTINUING A U.S. COMMITMENT TO GLOBAL HEALTH

Most foreign assistance—especially when directed toward health—is an investment in the health of the recipient country, the United States, and the world at large. U.S. motivation is two-pronged: to secure protection against global health threats, and to promote productivity and economic growth in other countries.

While the burden of infectious diseases rests predominantly with low-income countries, these diseases represent global threats that could have dire consequences for any country, including the United States, in both human and economic costs. The increasing prevalence of noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) has also negatively affected global economies, threatening societal gains in life expectancy, productivity, and overall quality of life.

Healthy populations are important on multiple levels. Investing in human capital contributes significantly to economic growth, prosperity, and stability in countries and creates more reliable and durable partners in the world. This strategy has proven successful, as evidenced by the fact that 11 of the top 15 trading partners of the United States are former recipients of foreign assistance.



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RECOMMENDATIONS AND ACTION AREAS

The committee proposes 14 recommendations to deliver a strong global health strategy and allow the United States to maintain its role as a global health leader. An overview of the committee's recommendations is provided in the box at right. To read the full text of the recommendations, please see the Recommendations document available at nationalacademies.org/USGlobalHealth.

The committee also identifies four priority areas for action that would result in the greatest positive effect on global health:

Achieve global health security

In the last 10 years, outbreaks of potentially pandemic influenza, Middle East Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus (MERS-CoV), Ebola, and Zika have threatened populations around the world. In each case, global and national responses, including those of the United States, have been reactionary, uncoordinated, and highly costly. Without fundamental public health protections and preparedness capabilities at home and abroad, the world will never be ready to prevent, detect, and respond to such outbreaks.

A sustainable mechanism for addressing these global threats is a critical need. The committee urges the administration to create a coordinating body within the U.S. government with the authority and budget to develop a proactive, cost-effective, and comprehensive approach to preparedness for and response to international public health emergencies. The United States should strengthen preparedness and response capacity in low- and middle-income countries through training and information exchange efforts. Continued investments at the national level—and increased investments at the international level—are also needed to better confront the growing and alarming threat of antimicrobial resistance (see Recommendations 1, 2, and 3).

Maintain a sustained response to the continuous threats of communicable diseases

HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis (TB), and malaria continue to pose immediate and longer-term global health threats. More than 36 million people are living with HIV, with 2 million new infections occurring each year. TB disproportionately affects the poorest populations of the world, killing 1.4 million each year, and dangerous resistant strains are becoming more prevalent and easily spread. The mortality rate due to malaria has decreased by more than 60 percent in the last 10 years, but those infected can lose 25 percent of their family's income as a result of their lost productivity, affecting the prosperity of the society at large.

A sustained focus on HIV/AIDS and malaria, as well as a re-evaluation of the commitment to fighting TB, are imperative to prevent reversal of the gains achieved in the last few decades and avoid the further spread of resistant strains for all three diseases (see Recommendations 4, 5, and 6).

Save and improve the lives of women and children

Efforts to save the lives of women and children across the globe have historically been an important focus for the U.S. government. Although child and maternal mortality rates have decreased since 2000, each year nearly 6 million children die before their fifth birthday, and more than 300,000 women die from pregnancy- and childbirth-related causes. The vast majority of these deaths are preventable.

REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation	Action
1	Improve international emergency response coordination
2	Combat antimicrobial resistance
3	Build public health capacity in low- and middle-income countries
4	Envision the next generation of the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief
5	Confront the threat of tuberculosis
6	Sustain progress toward malaria elimination
7	Improve survival in women and children
8	Ensure healthy and productive lives for women and children
9	Promote cardiovascular health and prevent cancer
10	Accelerate the development of medical products
11	Improve digital health infrastructure
12	Transition investments toward global public goods
13	Optimize resources through smart financing
14	Commit to continued global health leadership

The health and well-being of other countries directly and indirectly affect the health, safety, and economic security of Americans.

The U.S. commitment to the current survival agenda should be continued but also expanded to incorporate early childhood development as a key element. Adding a strong multisector focus on childhood development to current survival-focused programs can contribute to resilient societies and growing economies (see Recommendations 7 and 8).

Promote cardiovascular health and prevent cancer

Rates of NCDs, such as cardiovascular disease (CVD) and cancer, are rising in countries around the world, regardless of income level. The costs of managing these diseases are rising as well: CVD alone is projected to cost the world \$1 trillion annually in treatment costs and productivity losses by 2030.

Because of their historical focus on infectious diseases, many health systems in low- and middle-income countries are not adequately equipped to care for patients with NCDs. The need to fill these gaps often goes unmet because of other priorities, but their prevention and treatment can be built into existing platforms for other areas, such as HIV/AIDS or maternal and child health.

The committee urges improved mobilization and coordination of private partners at the country level and across the U.S. interagency community to implement strategies proven to ensure the highest impact. These strategies include targeting CVD risk factors, early detection and treatment of hypertension and cervical cancer, and immunization against vaccine-preventable cancers (see Recommendation 9).

MAXIMIZING RETURN ON INVESTMENT

The following three cross-cutting areas for action would maximize the returns on investments, achieve better health outcomes, and use funding more effectively: (1) catalyze innovation through both the accelerated development of medical products and integrated digital health infrastructure; (2) employ more nimble and flexible financing mechanisms to leverage new partners and funders in global health; and (3) maintain U.S. status and influence as a world leader in global health while adhering to evidence-based science and economics, measurement, and accountability (see Recommendations 10 through 14).

True improvements in global health will require changing the way global health business is conducted to better enable innovation. Adequately protecting U.S. citizens at home and abroad means investment in U.S. infrastructure and continued awareness of global issues and active engagement in the

international global health arena. Many of the events and elements of the changing global health landscape have created an environment for a centralized and comprehensive strategy for U.S. global health diplomacy. To these ends, a change in approach and long-term visioning across the various U.S. agencies involved in global health will be necessary, with an emphasis on integration and partnership.

Strong collaboration among donors, national governments, nongovernmental organizations, and private companies will be essential to achieving the proposed global health goals. Health effects extend far beyond the health sector, and addressing them will therefore require cross-sectoral interaction and synergy. While multilateral institutions continue to be crucial, engaging in more productive partnerships with other donor governments and the private sector can build on multilateral progress and lead to more successful outcomes moving forward. These joint investments should be geared toward harmonized approaches to global public goods and general global health goals shared by all countries. Finally, to have the greatest effect, all global health work should incorporate essential principles of community inclusion and cultural competency.

CONCLUSION

Implementing evidence-based interventions; modifying country engagement strategies; exploring new investment mechanisms; and taking a more proactive, systematic approach to global health priorities will make the U.S. government's efforts in global health more efficient and cost-effective.

The health and well-being of other countries directly and indirectly affect the health, safety, and economic security of Americans. The United States must preserve and extend its legacy as a global leader, partner, and innovator in global health through forward-looking policies, a long-term vision, country and international partnerships, and, most importantly, continued investment. Doing so will not only lead to improved health and security for all U.S. citizens but also ensure the sustainable thriving of the global population.

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