

Global Health Innovation at USAID:

Accelerating the Journey to Self-Reliance

The US Agency for International Development (USAID) supports the research, development, introduction, and scale up of urgently needed drugs, vaccines, and other technologies to address the unmet health needs of people in the world’s poorest places. As the only US agency with a mandate to focus on global health and development, USAID is uniquely positioned to support product development and innovation to advance global health. USAID’s deep international footprint combined with its thorough understanding of community needs and culture makes it a critical institution for developing new health tools that are appropriate, affordable, and accessible for broad uptake in low-resource settings.

In 2018, leadership at USAID began reorienting the agency to better support partner countries along their *journey to self-reliance*—supporting countries in their ability to plan, finance, and implement solutions to their own development challenges. New health technologies are essential to that journey.

This factsheet summarizes GHTC’s report, *Global Health Innovation at USAID: Accelerating the Journey to Self-Reliance*, which explores the challenges and opportunities that USAID faces in advancing health innovation and provides recommendations addressing those challenges to Congress and the Administration.

USAID support has helped advance:

22 new global health technologies since 2000

36 promising products into late-stage development

Leadership at USAID

Key finding: Global health R&D at USAID lacks high-level leadership and a clear focal point for external stakeholder engagement.

Several different entities and offices at USAID play a role in setting and advancing USAID’s global health R&D priorities and activities. This decentralized decisionmaking leads to missed opportunities for interagency coordination and shared learning practices, makes it difficult for external partners to collaborate with USAID on shared goals, and means there is no position of leadership with the authority, line of sight, or mandate to champion work internally or decide where and how much to invest in R&D.

Recommendation: USAID should establish a Chief Science and Product Development Officer for global health that will function at the level of a Deputy Assistant Administrator.

This position should have responsibility for USAID’s R&D vision and strategy, should work closely with research leads in technical offices, and should serve as a clear focal point for inter- and intra-agency collaboration and external stakeholder and public engagement.



PATH/Gabe Biencycki

Strategy and Reporting at USAID

Key finding: USAID’s strategy and progress reports for global health R&D need further clarification.

USAID maintains a documented strategy for global health R&D and produces two annual reports to Congress summarizing its achievements in global health R&D and innovation, but these documents do not clarify how USAID sets priorities for global health R&D nor detail USAID’s disease-specific target outcomes, desired impact, and investment decisions.

Recommendation: USAID should strengthen reporting on its global health R&D investments and impact.

The Global Health Innovation Act, enacted in 2019, authorizes an annual progress report to Congress on USAID’s development and use of global health innovations. USAID should be encouraged to release this report publicly to ensure external stakeholders can identify opportunities for collaboration. Additionally, USAID’s annual report on its health-related research and development strategy should list USAID’s health product development targets and timelines, detail how much USAID is investing in drugs, vaccines, diagnostics, and devices across each of its health areas and programs, and describe how the agency collaborates with other agencies and partners to ensure that US investments in global health research are efficient, coordinated, and maximally effective.

Funding for USAID

Key finding: USAID investments in global health R&D often have outsized impact, but the need for new tools eclipses current resourcing.

Unpredictable annualized funding hobbles USAID’s ability to work with national and global partners to advance shared product development. USAID strives to drive ambitious health outcomes, but with relatively flat appropriations across many disease-specific funding lines, it is forced to decide between maintaining essential health care delivery programs and making long-term investments in potentially game-changing R&D.

Recommendation: Congress should ensure robust investment in global health R&D and USAID should support R&D funding opportunities that are catalytic and flexible.

A sustainable funding stream for R&D is essential to accomplishing USAID’s long-term goals and ensuring countries make progress on the journey to self-reliance. USAID should continue to support and expand innovative financing and partnership models to drive global health R&D through co-investment.

USAID R&D Impact:

Newborn Health

Adaptation of the antiseptic chlorhexidine for umbilical cord care, which is projected to save 1,004,000 lives by 2030.

Meningitis

A low-cost meningitis A vaccine, which has prevented more than 378,000 deaths, now protects more than 315 million people across 23 of the 26 meningitis belt countries.

Malaria

A child-friendly malaria medicine, Coartem® Dispersible, developed with support from USAID, has saved an estimated 825,000 child lives since its launch in 2009.