

NEWS ARTICLE



Cambodia Strengthens Public-Private Partnerships to Accelerate Maternal and Child Health Progress

Journal of Women and Child Health (JoWaCH)

By JoWaCH News Desk

Published March 31, 2025

Volume 2 Issue 1 March 2025

Available at: [Link](#)

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.62807/jowach.v2i1.2025.1-2>



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Phnom Penh, Cambodia – In a concerted effort to address persistent gaps in reproductive, maternal, newborn, child, and adolescent health (RMNCAH), Cambodia marked National Maternal, Newborn and Child Health Day alongside World Health Day 2025. The dual commemoration, themed “Enhancing Public-Private Partnerships to Improve Quality of Care,” underscores the nation’s strategic pivot toward multisectoral collaboration to meet Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030.

Progress and Persistent Challenges

Cambodia has achieved notable strides in maternal and child health over the past two decades. Skilled birth attendance now stands at 98.7%, while neonatal and under-five mortality rates have plummeted by 54% between 2014 and 2022, outpacing

critical concern at 154 deaths per 100,000 live births—far above the SDG target of 70. Child malnutrition further complicates progress, with 22% of children under five stunted and 10% wasted, figures stagnant for over a decade.

“Reducing maternal and newborn mortality is a commitment, not just a priority,” emphasized H.E. Prof. CHHEANG Ra, Cambodia’s Minister of Health. “Elevating the quality of care is pivotal to saving lives and ensuring healthy futures.”

The Private Sector’s Role in Closing Equity Gaps

With 30% of pregnant women seeking care in private facilities, Cambodia’s Ministry of Health—supported by WHO, UNFPA, and NGOs including Helen Keller International and Marie Stopes Cambodia—is prioritizing public-private partnerships (PPPs) to expand access to quality services. Key initiatives include:

- **Standardized care protocols** for emergency obstetric and neonatal services across sectors
- **Digital health integration** to streamline referrals and real-time mortality reporting
- **Innovative financing models**, such as outcome-based subsidies for private providers

Dr. Marianna Trias, WHO Representative to Cambodia, noted, “Investing in quality maternal and newborn care benefits families, communities, and economies. Our focus is on ensuring every woman and child not only survives but thrives.”

Adolescent Health: A Multigenerational Imperative

The 2022 adolescent birth rate of 48 per 1,000 girls aged 15–19—disproportionately concentrated in rural areas—poses significant risks. Early pregnancies correlate with higher maternal mortality (2.5× risk for mothers under 20) and neonatal complications. To address this, Cambodia is scaling up:

- **Adolescent-friendly health services** in 500+ clinics, offering confidential reproductive care
- **School-based nutrition programs** targeting micronutrient deficiencies in 12–18-year-olds
- **Community-led campaigns** to reduce child marriage, prevalent in 19% of rural areas

Data-Driven Accountability

Despite progress, 60% of preventable maternal and neonatal deaths in low-income settings stem from care quality gaps. Cambodia’s new Maternal Mortality Surveillance System (MMSS), piloted in 10 provinces, aims to:

1. Track all maternal deaths and near-miss cases
2. Conduct root-cause analyses through multidisciplinary committees
3. Inform targeted interventions, such as midwife skill-

Preliminary MMSS data reveals that 43% of maternal deaths occur postpartum, signaling the need for enhanced postnatal follow-up.

The Road to 2030

Cambodia’s roadmap aligns with SDG 3.1/3.2 and the International Conference on Population and Development’s Programme of Action. Priority actions include:

- **Quadrupling investments** in rural emergency obstetric care by 2027
- **Expanding universal health coverage** to include postpartum mental health services
- **Leveraging AI to predict high-risk pregnancies** using demographic and biometric data

“Collaboration is our linchpin,” stated Dr. Yasmin Haque, UNFPA Cambodia Director. “By merging public infrastructure with private sector agility, we can bridge last-mile gaps in care access.”

Conclusion

As Cambodia accelerates its RMNCAH agenda, the fusion of PPPs, data transparency, and adolescent-centric policies offers a replicable model for low-resource settings. With maternal mortality declining at just 2.3% annually since 2015, sustained innovation—and rigorous implementation—will determine whether the 2030 targets remain within reach.

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