



# Merck for Mothers in Nigeria

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 Nigeria

Nigeria has the largest number of maternal deaths globally, accounting for over 20% of all maternal deaths annually. In 2017 alone, 67,000 Nigerian women died from complications related to pregnancy and childbirth, devastating families and communities and resulting in an estimated USD\$1.5 billion in lost productivity.<sup>1,2</sup>

Since 2015, Merck for Mothers has taken a comprehensive approach to help tackle the large burden of maternal deaths in Nigeria by supporting programs to provide women access to two of the most powerful ways to prevent these tragedies: quality maternity care services and modern contraception. We support work across both public and private health sectors so that any woman in the country can receive quality maternity care wherever and whenever she seeks care. Our efforts incorporate core principles that are true to our values: taking women-centered approaches, expanding access to quality care using the power of digital technologies, integrating the community to drive solutions and unlocking innovative financing mechanisms for long-term sustainability. Importantly, we cannot do this important work alone. Merck for Mothers believes that strong, multisector partnerships can help achieve the Government of Nigeria’s maternal health goals.

# Our Focus Areas



## Advancing Women's Maternity Care Experiences

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### Empowering Women to Demand Quality Maternity Care

Many women and their families do not know what good quality maternity care should look like – what to expect, what services they have a right to receive and what they should demand when they seek care. We are collaborating with a digital innovator who has designed a mobile technology solution – [Omomi](#) – that provides mothers and pregnant women with life-saving maternal and child health information, a platform to share feedback on the quality of services they receive and connections to providers in real time.

**Collaborator:** Mobicure

### 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 Nigeria receive four or more antenatal care visits.<sup>3</sup> 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.

**Collaborator:** PharmAccess Foundation



## Improving the Quality of Maternity Care

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### Linking Public and Private Maternity Care for Seamless Quality Care

Nigeria has a mixed health system, with more than 40% of the population receiving care from the private sector; yet private health providers are often not included in quality improvement efforts. In Cross River state, we supported an effort to expand access to high quality, comprehensive maternity care and strengthened linkages between more than 100 local public and private facilities. The result was a 66% reduction in maternal mortality in three years<sup>4</sup>, due in part to close collaboration among communities, providers and state health officials.

Drawing on lessons learned, we are supporting our collaborators to adapt this project for Kaduna state where the rate of facility delivery remains low at 17%. The key components include a lean quality improvement model using [SafeCare](#) standards to help private providers enhance their quality of care; digitally-enabled education and engagement with women and communities to improve health-seeking behaviors and increase facility delivery. This project is made possible through collaboration with the state ministry of health to enable long-term sustainability for quality maternity care.

**Collaborators:** Nivi, Pathfinder International, PharmAccess Foundation



## Addressing Indirect Causes of Maternal Mortality and Morbidity

In Nigeria, the proportion of maternal deaths due to indirect causes – such as diabetes, anemia, hypertension and risk factors for pre-eclampsia/eclampsia (PE/E) – are increasing. In Lagos and Federal Capital Territory, we are supporting a consortium – Reducing Indirect Causes for Maternal Morbidity and Mortality (RICOM3) – to better identify, prevent and manage these risk factors throughout pregnancy, reducing the likelihood of poor maternal health outcomes. RICOM3 is building providers’ clinical capabilities and implementing an integrated model to deliver quality care in 40 public and private facilities and reduce risk factors for PE/E along the pregnancy continuum. The project is also igniting women’s demand for high quality care via a digital self-care tool that empowers women to manage and track their health needs during pregnancy.

**Collaborators:** Jhpiego, mDoc, Health Strategy and Delivery Foundation

## Integrating Post-pregnancy Family Planning Services into Maternity Care

Although family planning is one of the most effective ways to reduce maternal mortality globally, only 12% of married women in Nigeria are using modern contraception,<sup>5</sup> one of the lowest rates in the world. 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 visits – in public and private facilities in Lagos state. 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:** Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Johns Hopkins Center for Communication Programs



## Strengthening Integrated Approaches to Sustain High Quality Maternity Care

### Broadening Access to Family Planning

Nigeria has one of the lowest modern contraceptive rates in the world, in part due to limited access to a broad range of quality family planning methods. We are supporting the [IntegratE](#) project to expand access to a range of quality family planning services. This effort is helping to implement the [Pharmacists Council of Nigeria’s](#) tiered accreditation system for local private drug shops, working with over 1,200 proprietary patent medicine vendors and community pharmacies in Lagos and Kaduna states. IntegratE is increasing the capabilities of these providers to offer a broader range of contraceptive products and services and to improve reporting, regulatory oversight and referral practices.

**Collaborators:** Society for Family Health, Population Council, PharmAccess Foundation, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation

## 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 Nigeria. In Kano, Lagos and Niger states, 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 PPH<sup>6</sup>.

**Collaborators:** Solina Centre for International Development and Research, Clinton Health Access Initiative, Co-Creation Hub Nigeria

## Establishing a National Maternal and Perinatal Death Database

Systematic collection of data on maternal and perinatal deaths and analysis of their root causes is limited in Nigeria – hindering efforts to improve maternity care. Through our collaboration with the World Health Organization's Quality, Equity, Dignity initiative (QED), we are supporting the development and implementation of an electronic national maternal and perinatal death database (MPD) called [MPD-4-QED](#). The project is beginning with a network of 54 referral hospitals across Nigeria to determine the causes of maternal and perinatal mortality and guide action to improve the quality of maternity care.

**Collaborators:** World Health Organization



<sup>1</sup> [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; 2017.

<sup>2</sup> Ajaja, T. "[Nigeria loses \\$1.5bn yearly to maternal deaths – UNFPA](#)." 9 March, 2017. Punch Nigeria.

<sup>3</sup> National Population Commission - NPC/Nigeria and ICF. . (2019). Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey 2018..

<sup>4</sup> Pathfinder International (2019). A whole-system approach to saving mothers in Cross River State, Nigeria. Available from [https://www.pathfinder.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/A-Whole-System-Approach-to-Saving-Mothers-in-CRS-Nigeria\\_Final\\_July2019.pdf](https://www.pathfinder.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/A-Whole-System-Approach-to-Saving-Mothers-in-CRS-Nigeria_Final_July2019.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> National Population Commission (NPC) [Nigeria] and ICF International. 2019. Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey 2018. Abuja, Nigeria, and Rockville, Maryland, USA: NPC and ICF International

<sup>6</sup> 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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