



# ADVANCING THE UNIVERSAL HEALTH COVERAGE AGENDA

## MERCK FOR MOTHERS' CONTRIBUTIONS

Universal health coverage — a cornerstone of the Sustainable Development Goals — is a global call to ensure that every individual is able to obtain good quality health services without facing financial hardship.<sup>1</sup> UHC has received nearly universal support<sup>2</sup> and in 2017, leaders of both the World Bank and World Health Organization (WHO) declared that the achievement of UHC is paramount.<sup>3</sup>

Increasingly, national governments are committing to reaching this goal. In many of these countries, a significant proportion of care is delivered by local private providers. However, governments' efforts toward universal health coverage tend to focus almost exclusively on the public health sector, often neglecting private care and its potential to expand the availability of vital health care services.<sup>4</sup>

### Our Perspective

*Merck for Mothers* is Merck's \$500 million initiative to help create a world where no woman dies giving life. Our investments in maternal health strengthen health systems so they can meet the demands of universal health coverage.

*Merck for Mothers* focuses on private care — an often overlooked part of the health system despite offering a significant proportion of care — because we believe that both public and private providers must improve the quality of care they offer to ensure better — and more equitable — maternal health outcomes.

We are working with governments, provider associations and NGOs to help build the capacity of private maternity providers — doctors, nurses, midwives, drug shop owners, community health workers — to consistently deliver high quality health services. Our goal is that all women have a healthy pregnancy and safe childbirth regardless of where they seek care.

### INVESTMENT SPOTLIGHT

**Using digital innovations and mobile money to improve access to affordable, quality care**

*Merck for Mothers* is partnering with M-TIBA, a mobile platform that helps women save, spend, and share funds for medical treatment. The platform also offers users the opportunity to provide feedback on the care they receive so that providers and payors understand consumer preferences. Patients can use feedback to choose healthcare providers — putting their resources towards quality care that they value. There is a growing body of evidence suggesting that women can judge health care quality and respond accordingly.<sup>12, 13</sup>



**m-tiba**

## Achieving universal health coverage requires:



Expanding the **availability** of health care services



Making health care more **affordable** for patients



Ensuring health care services are **high quality**



### Availability

**By integrating local private providers into strategies to achieve universal health coverage, we expand the availability of health services to reach more people**

Availability of reproductive, maternal, newborn, and child health (RMNCH) interventions is rising globally, but we still have far to go to achieve universal health coverage.<sup>5</sup> Some indicators, like institutional deliveries, are rising. However, availability of emergency obstetric care is not adequate; for example, median coverage for C-sections remains low at only 6%, well below the WHO-recommended rate of 10-15%.<sup>6,7</sup>

In many low- and middle-income countries, approximately 40% of women seeking care receive maternal health and family planning services from private health providers.<sup>8</sup> Given the significant role these local providers play, it would be a missed opportunity if health systems failed to integrate them into national efforts to expand maternal health care coverage more broadly.<sup>9,10</sup>

*Merck for Mothers* has a long history of advocating for the inclusion of private care in national health strategies in contexts as diverse as India, Uganda, Nigeria and Kenya. To help demonstrate the value of private care in strengthening health systems, we are collaborating with the WHO and Results for Development.

These partnerships will generate evidence and guidance for government leaders, policy makers and global development donors on effective strategies to integrate private providers into national health systems.



### Affordability

**By investing in innovations that encourage women to plan and save for childbirth, we help patients safeguard against catastrophic health expenditures**

Health services must be available and affordable to ensure equitable access. Globally, many countries are putting financing models in place that protect patients from catastrophic health expenditures. *Merck for Mothers* advocates for including both public and private providers in these financing schemes, such as vouchers or insurance, to help ensure that health care costs are covered wherever women choose to seek care.

However, financing the cost of care will not improve health outcomes if the quality of that care is poor.<sup>11</sup> *Merck for Mothers* is exploring mobile platforms that help link women to maternal health care services that are both affordable and high quality.



## INVESTMENT SPOTLIGHT

### Improving the quality of care among private providers in India

*Merck for Mothers* partners with Jhpiego and the Federation of Obstetric and Gynecological Societies of India (FOGSI) on Manyata — an initiative that builds providers' capacity to meet evidence-based, WHO-aligned, national quality standards and recognizes providers who meet standards with a quality certification. Today, over 400 local private providers in Uttar Pradesh, Jharkhand and Maharashtra are working to meet national quality standards so they will be ready to apply for Manyata.

With technical support from Jhpiego and FOGSI, providers assess their care, develop quality improvement plans, participate in drills and on-site mentoring, and learn to develop and use standardized data collection tools so they can track the quality of their care. When enough private providers offer quality care, governments can include more private providers as an option for strategic purchasing of health services.

These programs are supported by funding from Merck, through *Merck for Mothers*, the company's \$500 million initiative to help create a world where no woman dies giving life. *Merck for Mothers* is an initiative of Merck & Co., Inc., Kenilworth, NJ, USA.



## INVESTMENT SPOTLIGHT

### Igniting consumer demand for quality care

We invest in several digital platforms that help women understand and report on the quality of care they receive. For example, Together for Her Health encourages women to rate the quality of their care online. Providers receive patient's ratings, creating a feedback loop for quality improvement. Ratings are also publicly posted so that other women can use peer feedback to help choose their own maternity provider.

The platform also educates and empowers women to make more informed choices about where to seek quality care. We are exploring mobile or web-based platforms in settings as diverse as the United States and Nigeria to help health systems collect better data on maternal morbidity and mortality and respond to women's needs.



## Quality

**By focusing on quality, we ensure that health services are effective, and that consumers and payors receive better value**

Expanding availability and affordability of care without improving quality will not improve population health. In 2016, almost 5 million deaths could have been averted with better quality care.<sup>14</sup> UHC cannot achieve its primary objective of creating better health unless patients have access to services that are high quality.<sup>15</sup>

Unfortunately, in many low and middle-income settings, there is poor quality care in both the public and private sectors.<sup>16, 17, 18</sup> Often, standards for quality maternity care are inconsistent, making it difficult to define and measure quality. Private maternity providers also lack the tools and capacity to improve the quality of care they offer.

To ensure that local private providers deliver quality care and contribute toward UHC, the right incentives need to be in place.<sup>19</sup> *Merck for Mothers* takes on this challenge by working with partners to streamline quality standards and tools for maternity care and integrate these standards into quality improvement and quality assurance systems.

Patient demand is also important to sustain the delivery of high quality care. When women have information about the quality of care they should receive, they become more informed health care consumers. As a result, they are able to demand quality care and can drive the market to upgrade services. Governments, health care providers and payors have an important role to play in encouraging women's feedback on the care they receive and holding themselves accountable to deliver better care — a cornerstone of UHC.

## Way Forward

Looking ahead, *Merck for Mothers* will continue to advocate for quality to be at the forefront of the UHC conversation. Quality care is central to our approach to save women's lives, improve maternal health and ensure more equitable health outcomes for women around the world.

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