

HAITI ADVOCACY WORKING GROUP (HAWG)

HAWG is a working group of international development, faith-based, human rights and social justice organizations advocating on issues related to U.S.-Haiti policy.

Health Challenges in Haiti

The massive earthquake in Haiti on January 12, 2010, hit a country whose health systems were already resource-starved, understaffed, and poorly stocked. This weak system, which was funded by the government at less than \$8 per capita,¹ faced an enormous disease burden. With 2.2% of the population HIV positive,² 18.9% of children under 5 underweight,³ and the WHO recording 29,000 new TB cases every year,⁴ the Office of the Haitian Ministry of Health, Ministère de la Santé Publique et de la Populations (MSPP), faced a dire situation even before the dramatic escalation of health needs resulting from the earthquake and the ensuing destabilization.

In the wake of the earthquake, widespread social and economic volatility have exacerbated existing health problems and created new issues. Particularly, orthopedic injuries have increased the demand for surgical care and rehabilitation services. Follow-up appointments, home-care visits, and intensive physical therapy are necessary for the recovery of newly injured or disabled patients, and obtaining these services has proven especially challenging in a post-disaster setting. Prosthetics, especially pediatric, are greatly needed in addition to long-term care for new patients with prosthetics.

Additionally, the vulnerability of women and children has increased, particularly those among the populations of internally displaced persons (IDPs) living in temporary camps and settlements. There is a significant need to provide reproductive and perinatal care to pregnant women as well as to ensure safe spaces for breastfeeding. Many children have also been displaced as a result of the earthquake, and there is an urgent need to ensure their safety as well as access to health care. The earthquake has amplified the need for psychological support in all Haitian populations, and many are in desperate need of counseling and treatment as they face tragedy and an uncertain future. Compounding both the bodily and mental health issues facing displaced Haitians, stresses on water and sanitation systems and agricultural markets have put the basic needs of Haiti's population in jeopardy.

Facing such an overwhelming situation, the Haitian government has drafted an Action Plan for the Reconstruction and National Development of Haiti, through which the government hopes to facilitate and lead Haitian recovery. The Action Plan includes specific strategies for the development of the health sector, including the construction of eight referral hospitals supported by stronger primary care units. It also calls for an emphasis on follow-up care for those who have had major surgery, increased attention to treatment of acute malnutrition in the country's increasingly vulnerable children, and expansion of the public water and sanitation systems. In order to implement these plans, Haitian officials have called on Haiti's major supporters to provide

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Multiple organizations contribute on a case by case basis to issue or sector specific recommendations and positions expressed in HAWG materials. These materials are not designed to be consensus positions and have not been explicitly endorsed by each organization active in the HAWG.

budgetary support for the government, while at the same time working through NGOs to align private projects with the public vision that has been laid out.

Recommendations

1. Support expansion of the MSPP through public sector aid and advising so that it may fulfill its citizens' rights through comprehensive health care programs capable of reaching all Haitians
2. Respect the recommendations of the Haitian government's Action Plan for the Reconstruction and National Development of Haiti by partnering with Haitian officials to advance their initiatives, achieve their goals, and assist them in meeting their obligations to fulfill Haitian citizens' right to health care
3. Ensure the ability of the public health sector to pay its employees, hire new local staff, and expand monitoring and regulation efforts
4. Engage NGOs and civil society to achieve plans and goals set by the MSPP
5. Promote the repair of existing public sector infrastructure and the future expansion of health facilities and health professional education systems in such a way that strengthens the public health infrastructure from top to bottom
6. Support the provision of comprehensive medical and social care including surgical care, follow-up care, psychosocial support, and physical rehabilitation services
7. Maintain and expand prevention and treatment programs for HIV/AIDS, malaria and TB, so as to prevent any back-sliding in Haiti's fight against these endemic diseases
8. Work towards actively finding, supporting, and treating the basic psychological needs and acute mental health issues facing internally displaced persons (IDPs) and other vulnerable populations
9. Support the health needs of women and children, who are particularly vulnerable in the displacement camps, by addressing issues of physical safety, pregnancy-related care, family planning, STI treatment, and nutrition.
10. Attend to the comprehensive social and economic needs of IDPs, which underlie their overall health, by working towards providing greater camp security, ensuring permanent and safe housing, working towards greater food security, promoting the creation of dignifying jobs, and improving access to clean water and safe sanitation systems
11. Ensure sustainable aid to provide aid in a reliable and long-term fashion that addresses the acute problems of post-disaster health crises in such a way that promotes resolution of long-existing health disparities

US Organizations Working on the Issue

- Partners In Health

Haitian Partner Organizations Working on the Issue

- Zanmi Lasante

¹ Global Health Observatory. "Health Expenditure Per Capita." *GHO Data: World Health Statistics*. World Health Organization. Web. 7 July 2010. <<http://apps.who.int/ghodata/>>.

² WHO,UNAIDS, & UNICEF. (2008, December). *Epidemiological Fact Sheet on HIV and AIDS: Haiti 2008 Update*. Retrieved July 8, 2010, available at http://apps.who.int/globalatlas/predefinedReports/EFS2008/full/EFS2008_HT.pdf, p. 4.

³ WHOSIS. "World Health Statistics 2010." *World Health Organization*. World Health Organization, 2010. Web. 7 July 2010. http://www.who.int/whosis/whostat/EN_WHS10_Full.pdf, p. 23.

⁴ WHO. *Haiti TB Country Profile*. Retrieved July 8, 2010, available at http://apps.who.int/globalatlas/predefinedReports/TB/PDF_Files/hti.pdf, p. 1.