

Prioritizing low-cost, simple health measures would save 2.5 million child lives a year

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Almost a third of the children under age five who die each year could be saved if governments rebalance health spending to ensure low-cost, simple interventions such as safe water and hygiene, bed nets and basic maternal and newborn care, leading aid agency World Vision said today. Currently, 8.8 million children a year die before age five, most of preventable causes.

A new report by the Christian humanitarian agency calls for scaling up simple preventive health measures for mothers and children, particularly at the community level. This must be a priority to make rapid progress against the top child killers of [pneumonia](#), diarrhea and [malaria](#), the international analysis shows. Citing interventions that can cost pennies, the study concludes that more strategic use of funding and resources would keep millions of children from dying before they reach their fifth birthdays.

"Our world is in the grip of a chronic humanitarian crisis with more than 24,000 children dying each day," said World Vision International's President Kevin Jenkins. "Yet we know that even in the poorest countries, most [child deaths](#) are not inevitable."

"The truth is politics, not poverty, is what is killing these children. For many politicians, saving infants and children from illness and death is simply not a priority. Our campaign will mobilize and equip people worldwide to hold their leaders to account for ensuring child health now," said Jenkins.

The report comes as World Vision launches Child Health Now, its first global advocacy campaign, for the 100 countries in which it works. The five-year initiative aims to help reduce child mortality by two-thirds by 2015 through ensuring government leaders deliver on their commitments to help meet this goal.*

"At least 2.5 million children's lives could be saved each year by implementing low-cost, simple interventions such as water and hygiene, bed nets, and basic maternal and newborn care," said World Vision's Jenkins. "As many as six million children could be saved yearly by combining these approaches with more strategic allocation of resources to meet needs at the community level, and by fulfilled global donor commitments."

In the U.S., government leaders have the opportunity to build on the country's global health funding leadership by appropriating the resources promised in last year's Global AIDS, TB and Malaria bill, and moving on to pass the newly introduced Global Child Survival Act of 2009, which calls for a clear, coordinated strategy to save the lives of newborns, infants and children in developing countries.

Recent history shows substantial progress is achievable: child deaths have been cut by more than half since 1960, when 20 million children died from preventable causes. [Child mortality](#) has decreased in all regions of the world because of increased access to interventions such as oral rehydration therapy and immunizations - and further progress can be made by expanding those approaches, emphasizing hand washing with soap and providing needed vitamins, among other basic steps

Report author Regina Keith, World Vision's senior health campaign adviser, said much health funding - both from donor nations and developing countries' budgets -- is spent in ways that fail to have the greatest impact.

"Prevention is better, and cheaper, than treating children once they get ill," said Keith. "Yet an estimated 270 million children live in what amounts to a health care desert, lacking access to even the most basic provision, while millions more face patchy, low-quality systems they can't afford. If countries want to ensure the survival of their next generation, they must focus on providing low-cost, simple interventions to keep these young [children](#) healthy."

Source: World Vision

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