

Trust the evidence: invest in midwives

Statement by UNFPA Executive Director Dr. Natalia Kanem
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Every day in every part of the world, midwives save the lives of women and babies and promote the health and well-being of entire communities.

They deserve our respect and gratitude, but that is not enough.

Midwives deserve greater investment in their capabilities, and workplaces that empower them and fully acknowledge their skills and contributions.

On the International Day of the Midwife, we honour the extraordinary contribution of midwives to humanity, and highlight the mounting data and evidence for more investment in midwifery as an essential element of health care.

The latest edition of the *State of the World's Midwifery* report launched today by UNFPA, the World Health Organization and the International Confederation of Midwives affirms that if we increase the number of midwives and the quality of care they provide, we would save an estimated 4.3 million lives a year by 2035. Universal coverage of midwife-delivered interventions by 2035 would avert 67 per cent of maternal deaths.

Such achievements depend on midwives gaining better education and training, along with comprehensive and supportive workplace regulation. They must have a greater role in professional leadership and governance, and scope to use their unique experience to drive advancements in health policies and service delivery.

Midwives often work under extraordinary circumstances. They may walk miles to reach women or open space in their own homes to help them safely give birth. They have faced increasing pressure during the COVID-19 pandemic, and heightened inequalities in their workplaces. Often short on protective gear, and with less access to vaccines than other healthcare workers, midwives have put their own lives at risk serving others.

Such dedication is an invaluable resource, yet too many health systems depend on it without commensurate backing of midwifery as a profession. That will short-circuit ambitions to reach the goal of zero preventable maternal deaths by 2030.

We have the evidence and know what must be done. Health systems everywhere need to take note – and take action – because investing in empowered midwives is one of the surest ways to safeguard life and protect the health and well-being of all.