

Submission on Priorities for the 2024-25 Budget

JANUARY 2024

About Results

Results International (Australia) is part of a global non-partisan movement of advocates working to improve global health and end poverty. With our national network of volunteers, Results amplifies knowledge and expertise in global health and development. For more than 35 years, Results has been working with federal parliamentarians and everyday Australians to help generate the public and political will to end global poverty. Results is a partner of ACTION, a global partnership of independent organisations working to influence policy and mobilise resources to fight diseases of poverty and achieve equitable access to health.

Summary

In determining priorities for the upcoming budget, Results calls on the Australian Government to increase the volume of Australian aid and invest in health and human development programs to ensure a peaceful, stable, and prosperous future for Australia and our region. Profound challenges such as climate change, conflict and inequality continue to reshape our world and test our collective resolve. Given the scale of global challenges ahead, Australia needs to increase funding and deepen engagement with international partners and re-commit to ending poverty.

With Australia's new International Development Policy, the setting and priorities for the Australian aid program have been made clear. The policy and performance and delivery framework set a bold vision. Through listening, respect and increased investment, Australia will be able to build and leverage critical partnerships in the region and contribute to human development.

The world is at the halfway mark for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and we have until 2030 to rapidly scale-up programs and achieve the 17 goals. The SDGs are ambitious but within reach. Australia needs to work with world leaders to fund and sustain a concerted push to implement solutions that work. Ending poverty is possible, but government leadership is essential. In this submission, Results outlines priorities to build human capital, strengthen health systems and step-up on climate change. By working closely with civil society, contributing to multilateral initiatives and building respectful partnerships, Australia can help to end poverty and ensure a safer world for all. Results calls on the Australian Government to:

1. End the Tuberculosis epidemic
2. Invest in partnerships to improve health for women and children
3. Expand access to immunisation by increasing funds to Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance
4. Increase the volume of Australian aid
5. Expand civil society partnerships and promote inclusive development
6. Improve food systems and access to nutritious food
7. Provide leadership to tackle the climate crisis.

1. End the tuberculosis epidemic

Approximately 10.6 million people fell ill with tuberculosis (TB) worldwide in 2022.¹ While TB is curable and preventable, the infectious disease affects all countries and age groups. In Asia and the Pacific, TB remains a leading cause of death from an infectious disease. TB is a pandemic that has claimed lives for centuries and thrives on poverty and inequality. Outbreaks of TB present a public health challenge in countries across our region, with a high burden of cases in Papua New Guinea, Indonesia, Cambodia, Timor-Leste, Vietnam, Myanmar and Kiribati. Multidrug-resistant TB (MDR-TB) remains a public health crisis, particularly in Papua New Guinea.²

With good news in November 2023, the WHO reported a global recovery in the scale-up of TB diagnosis and treatment services following COVID-19 disruptions. TB-related deaths, including those among people with HIV, decreased to 1.3 million in 2022, with notable progress in high burden countries, including India, Indonesia, and the Philippines. All three countries had invested in testing and treatment and in 2022, programs recovered to peak coverage levels last seen in 2019.³ More funding and scale-up of treatment programs is needed to achieve the End TB targets set in 2018. Looking at progress against those targets, TB-related deaths globally have only decreased by 19%, far short of the milestone of a 75% reduction by 2025. As a marker for Universal Health Coverage (UHC), the WHO found that more than half of the world's TB patients and their households face exorbitant medical costs.⁴

With investments in research and development (R&D), public health and a focus on testing and treatment, we can end the TB epidemic. Active case finding, diagnosis, treatment and community-based care help to prevent onward transmission. In recent years, Australia has provided leadership in funding, science and research to end TB. **Renewed support for efforts to end TB is now critical, as we work towards the targets of Sustainable Development Goal 3.**⁵

The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, TB and Malaria provides 76% of international financing for TB.⁶ Through country coordinating mechanisms and major partnerships with the World Bank⁷ and the US Government,⁸ the Global Fund provides critical support to national health systems and TB programs in our region. Partnerships for a Healthy Region, announced by the Foreign Minister in February 2023, was a welcome initiative and recent announcements to fund sexual and reproductive health and rights, health emergencies, cervical cancer and HIV will improve access to services and health and wellbeing.⁹ However, with this broader approach to health in the region, TB-specific programming faces shortfalls in key countries, including Papua New Guinea. Programs to test and treat TB in Indonesia and Timor-Leste also require longer-term support. **As DFAT leads work to consult on Development Partnership Plans at the country level, health – and TB in particular – should be a priority area for investment and bilateral partnership.**

Major funding gaps exist in financing for development of TB tests, treatments and vaccines. Recent data shows we are barely halfway to the USD 10 billion pledge for TB R&D by world leaders in 2018.¹⁰ TB is often neglected in R&D, and Australian leadership since 2018 through regional health security initiatives helped to address this imbalance. Product Development Partnerships (PDPs) have been an important mechanism to advance the development of tools and treatments and ensure access. Australian support for diagnostic development through FIND, funding for TB vaccine trials as well as groundbreaking work by TB Alliance¹¹ have provided a major boost to the fight against TB. With support from Australia and other funders over the last decade, tools and treatments for TB have improved dramatically, and a pipeline of new drugs, diagnostics and vaccines now exists.

There are currently 16 candidate vaccines in development for TB and a more effective vaccine to prevent severe illness and death from TB has never been this close.¹² **Eliminating TB by 2030 is within reach, but Australia must continue to invest in PDPs, particularly in vaccines, treatments and diagnostics to end the TB epidemic.**

2. Invest in partnerships to improve health for women and children

Funding to empower women and improve health for women and children contributes to human development, boosts economies and reduces inequality. Gender inequality and discrimination faced by women and girls puts health and well-being at risk. Women and girls often face greater barriers than men and boys to accessing health information and services. Over many decades, Australian advocacy and leadership on gender equality has contributed to a global movement for change. Work in 2023 to develop a new strategy for international gender equality confirmed the need for accelerated action on gender equality, particularly in Southeast Asia and the Pacific. Gender equality is an essential foundation for a safer world. Economies are more resilient, productive and inclusive when they reduce gender inequalities and actively support the equal participation of women in all spheres of life.¹³ **Through bilateral programs and multilateral initiatives, Australia should increase investments to improve the health of women and girls and support women's leadership.**

Projections suggest that 340 million women and girls will still live in extreme poverty by 2030¹⁴ and it will take up to 132 years to achieve gender equality.¹⁵ Globally, we have seen improvements in health indicators for women, children and adolescents but this progress stalled during the COVID-19 pandemic, and disruptions to primary health care have reduced coverage of lifesaving health interventions. Greater investments are needed to rebuild and strengthen health systems in Southeast Asia and the Pacific, to increase access for women and children.

Research published in the British Medical Journal found that investing in women's health has potential to redress violations of women's rights and gender inequities, as well as generate disproportionately large health, economic, social, and environmental gains.¹⁶ The indirect benefits of investments in women's health are often undervalued, and research published in The Lancet found extensive society-wide benefits from health programs focussed on women.¹⁷

Primary health care plays a critical role in making health systems more resilient during crises.¹⁸ Comprehensive and resilient primary health care systems must provide services that are inclusive and accessible to all, with planning to ensure inclusion and accessibility for people who are poor, marginalised, living in remote locations and with disabilities. Significant evidence confirms that strengthened primary care systems improve health outcomes and that the supply of health workers and access to doctors reduces mortality.¹⁹ Boosting primary health care is critical to achieving UHC given it is the most cost-effective, equitable, efficient and inclusive approach to enhancing an individual's physical, mental and social well-being.²⁰

Shifts since 2022 by Australia and the announcement of Partnerships for a Healthy Region in early 2023 represent positive steps and an important recognition of the range of health challenges for our region. Expanded Australian health assistance – delivered through close engagement and listening to partners in our region – will be important in the fight against non-communicable diseases (NCDs), help countries

respond to the climate crisis, prepare for health emergencies and support the expansion of UHC. Australian commitments through Partnerships for a Healthy Region over the next five years should not be the end of the line. In 2024, it will be important to ensure that health features in new bilateral investments and that health system strengthening is prioritised in DFAT's Development Partnership Plans for the region. **Funds should be provided for regional and global partnerships that work to increase access to health.**

The US, UK, Japan, Canada and other like-minded contribute to the Global Financing Facility for Women, Children and Adolescents (GFF), hosted by the World Bank. Working through country partnerships, the GFF strengthens health equity, sexual and reproductive rights and healthcare access for women and children in Indonesia, Vietnam, Cambodia and Myanmar. By contributing to initiatives such as the GFF, Australia can show greater leadership for the health of women and children in our region, and improve the lives of vulnerable people.

Cervical cancer is a major global health challenge, disproportionately affecting women in low-income countries and poor women within countries. The Pacific has the second-highest rate of burden of cervical cancer in the world, and with partnerships announced in 2023, new funding will help to share Australia world-leading expertise with the Pacific and Southeast Asia, and work towards a world free of this deadly disease. Australia has long been a leader among donors in prioritising gender equality, including the mandate from the budget in October 2022 that all Australian aid programs over \$3 million must now have a principal or significant gender equality objective.²¹ Australia's recent investment in sexual and reproductive health and commitments on cervical cancer prevention are positive steps forward. **Clear guidance and consistent monitoring is required to ensure gender components are strengthened in large programs.**

3. Expand access to immunisation by increasing funds to Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance

Immunisation is a global health and development success story, saving millions of lives every year. Providing vaccines for children and adults is an important function of primary health care and one of the best health investments money can buy.²² Vaccines are key in efforts to increase child survival and prevent the spread of infectious diseases. Through multilateral partnerships such as Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance and health system strengthening in our region, Australian aid has played an important role in efforts to drive up coverage across countries of Southeast Asia and the Pacific. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, with support from Gavi and Australian aid, countries such as Vietnam, Solomon Islands and Fiji reported rates of more than 94% for diphtheria tetanus toxoid and pertussis (DTP3) coverage among 1-year-olds. Progress in reaching vaccination targets and reducing the number of zero-dose children in our region has stalled since 2020, and the benefits of vaccines remain unevenly distributed. Nearly 20 million infants each year have insufficient access to vaccines.²³ In 2022, the percentage of children receiving a first dose of measles vaccine was 83%, below the 2019 level of 86%.²⁴ Globally, 67 million children missed out on vaccinations between 2019 and 2021, with vaccination coverage levels decreasing in 112 countries.²⁵

In 2000, Australia joined an international alliance with other donors, international organisations and private sector partners to ensure equitable access to vaccines. The success of Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance has been extraordinary and consistent pledges from Australia have helped Gavi to work with national partners and vaccinate more than 1 billion children and avert 17.2 million deaths from preventable diseases.²⁶ Since 2000, global rates of child mortality have nearly halved.²⁷ Across our region, national programs for immunisation are much stronger and vaccine delivery is incorporated as a core function for primary health care. DFAT's support for timely, equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines also helped to strengthen health systems and bolster pandemic recovery. Australia will be invited late in 2024 to make a pledge in support of Gavi's critical work to provide life-saving vaccines. **As the 2030 deadline for the SDGs nears, Australia should increase investments in Gavi to ensure the delivery of millions of lifesaving vaccines to children in low and middle-income countries.**

4. Increase the volume of Australian aid

At the SDG Summit in September last year, the UN Secretary-General said: 'Without a surge in commitment, solidarity, and transformative action, we will miss the headline targets of the 2030 Agenda to end poverty, reduce inequality and protect the environment'.²⁸ The Australian Government has acknowledged that profound challenges continue to reshape our world. Challenges in the region are compounded by climate change and economic headwinds. The International Development Policy's drive for peace, stability, and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific will only be possible with a significant step-up in leadership and investment from the Australian Government. The past 10 years saw savage cuts to the aid program and this has hampered Australia's development capability, stalled progress and impacted partnerships.

It was encouraging to see the Australian Labor Party reconfirm its commitment to rebuilding Australia's international development program and increasing Official Development Assistance (ODA) towards a target of 0.5% of Gross National Income.²⁹ While Federal Budgets in 2022 and 2023 stabilised funding and bolstered regional partnerships, Australian ODA is set to flatline in real terms from 2026. With climate change, conflict and displacement, humanitarian and development needs are increasing. Australia continues to lag behind like-minded donors, despite our commitments to be a reliable partner and generous contributor to regional and global challenges.

Spent wisely, ODA has the power to save lives and transform systems, create jobs and lift people out of poverty. As former Foreign Minister Gareth Evans noted recently,³⁰ the moral case for increasing Australian aid is complemented by a compelling national interest argument. A key return on strong ODA investments for Australia is reputational advantage. The way Australia is seen by other countries is fundamentally important in determining our success in advancing and protecting national economic and security interests. Over the past decade, the drop in assistance from Australia has been noticed and left voids for others to fill. Australia's position in our region has slipped. **Australia needs a plan to increase ODA to 0.5% of GNI, with interim goals to meet the OECD DAC average of 0.36% by the end of 2027.** This will require additional funding and Results joins other NGOs in calls to review tax measures and end fossil fuel subsidies. Greater investment is needed to effectively address urgent efforts to strengthen health systems and invest in human development.

5. Expand civil society partnerships and promote inclusive development

Australia's new International Development Policy enshrines a strong commitment to locally-led development; this will only be realised through adequate, increased and sustained funding. Over decades NGOs have demonstrated value in delivering effective development solutions, ensuring accountability and bolstering democratic participation in countries of our region. **Australia must support the development of a more robust civil society in the region and fund NGO voices.** Expanding civil society partnerships through the aid program will be key in the years to come. Results welcomes recent announcements from the Government to design and establish a Civil Society Partnerships Fund and to increase funding to the Australian NGO Cooperation Program (ANCP). Both measures will promote pluralism, build partnerships and contribute to a safer world for all. Both should be funded through new and additional budget measures.

As the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade (JSCFADT) Inquiry recognised this year, investment in CSOs helps Australia generate strong and enduring relationships with populations in neighbouring countries. Extensive research and experience show that gender equality and social inclusion are requirements for good governance and democracy and ultimately shared prosperity.³¹ Last year, Results and other organisations called for the establishment of a CSO hub as a coordination point for civil society partners. This recommendation was adopted by JSCFADT, and is listed as recommendation 7 in the final report.³²

ANCP amplifies community support for the aid program and enables accredited NGOs to deliver programs in communities impacted by poverty. Reviews and evaluations of the ANCP over the past two years have confirmed the value of this program and the potential for Australian NGOs to partner in the region and deliver vital development programs.

Globally, one in every six people live with a disability and in our region people with disabilities are among the poorest and most marginalised. People with disabilities face barriers in accessing health care and are disproportionately affected in disaster, emergency, and conflict situations. Australia has been a global leader in disability-inclusive development for more than a decade. Australian aid has helped people with disabilities to be included in society and realise their rights. In recent years, progress on disability and inclusion has faltered, with gaps in implementation from strategy to program level, a lack of strategic direction and stagnant funding. **DFAT should increase funding to the central disability allocation and institute targets to ensure programs effectively address disability equity, similar to commitments in place for gender equality.**

6. Improve food systems and access to nutritious food

Across the world, COVID-19, conflict, climate shocks and inflation have had a major impact on food security. Recent data suggests more than 42% of people globally are unable to afford a healthy diet.³³ In 2022, UNICEF reported more than 45 million children globally were impacted by acute malnutrition, a life-threatening condition that leaves children vulnerable to death, developmental delays and disease.³⁴ In our region, despite decades of investment in human capital and economic growth, malnutrition continues to pose public health challenges, particularly among the poorest and most vulnerable. Across

Asia and the Pacific, challenges vary and the region faces a 'triple burden' of malnutrition with undernutrition, micronutrient deficiencies and overnutrition. In Timor-Leste, almost 19% of women aged 15–49 are underweight and almost 39% are anaemic.³⁵ Indonesia has made progress towards achieving nutrition targets, however around 30% of children under 5 years of age are still affected by stunting and 10% are affected by wasting.³⁶ In the Pacific, most adults (88%) do not consume enough fruit and vegetables, and a high proportion of people are overweight or obese and have dietary risks for NCDs. Population-wide approaches to promote fruit and vegetable consumption and reduce sugar, salt and fat intake need strengthening.³⁷

The Global Nutrition Report found that most donors and stakeholders had invested in programs with a focus on governance, policy and undernutrition; little attention is paid to poor diets, obesity and diet-related NCDs or food and nutrition security. Nutrition services that are built into healthcare services – whether public or private – are vital to achieving the significant mutual benefits to be gained by integrating health and nutrition.³⁸ WHO asserts that UHC cannot be achieved without the integration of nutrition services. Health programs and services should seek to address broad challenges in nutrition, from undernutrition to preventing and treating diet-related NCDs, as well as supplementation programs, breastfeeding support and nutrition counselling.³⁹

Australia's approach to nutrition adopts a multisectoral lens. Trade, social protection, climate, farming, fisheries and the economy all impact access to nutritious food. Across Asia and the Pacific, there is clear evidence that global food systems fail to deliver healthy diets for all. Facing the realities of climate change, we need to transform our food systems to promote people, planetary and animal health. Leveraging Australian expertise, past investments by the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research and other agencies in research and capacity building have sought to improve food systems, boost economies and impact access to healthy food. In August last year, DFAT released a guidance note on nutrition-sensitive agriculture and food systems to integrate nutrition into agriculture programming and facilitate a food system approach to achieving nutrition impacts.⁴⁰ **To build on this, Australia needs to develop a more comprehensive Food Security Strategy and fund a series of investments to elevate the nutrition agenda and address food insecurity in our region.**

7. Provide leadership to tackle the climate crisis

The climate crisis threatens to undo decades of progress in global health and poverty reduction, and to widen existing health inequalities. Climate change poses massive risks for global health and warming will worsen the spread of infectious diseases. 58% of all known infectious diseases can be aggravated by climate change.⁴¹ Climate change increases the frequency and severity of extreme weather events, such as floods, cyclones, typhoons, droughts and heatwaves. Countries in our region are now forced to manage more outbreaks of vector-borne and waterborne diseases, food insecurity and water scarcity. Psychosocial impacts on individuals and communities, and increases in NCDs as a result of air pollution and extreme temperatures, present indirect and longer-term risks and impacts.⁴²

After a decade of stalled progress, it is encouraging to see the Australian Government listening to Pacific leaders and recognising the world's climate emergency. At COP28 in Dubai in December Australian Ministers noted: 'Climate change is the single greatest threat to the livelihoods, security and

wellbeing of climate vulnerable countries and regions, including the peoples of the Pacific.⁴³ Funding of \$100 million to the Pacific Resilience Facility (PRF) and a contribution of \$50 million to the Green Climate Fund (GCF) are positive first steps. Much more will be required in the coming years.

There is no time to delay meaningful action. As Australia prepares to host COP31 with our Pacific partners, Australia must deliver on commitments to increase climate financing. Across Pacific Island countries, there is a growing need for adaptation assistance, as well as loss and damage funding for communities to recover and rebuild from disasters. Partnerships through our aid program should be prioritised to expand locally-led climate adaptation programs.

Additional funding needs to be allocated for global and regional climate financing; this should not displace development funding. The Government must plan for scaled-up funding to meet Australia's fair share of climate finance, by providing \$4bn per year by 2025 in new and additional funding to support urgent climate mitigation, adaptation and loss and damage.

The establishment of a Loss and Damage Fund was a breakthrough development in 2023. The Loss and Damage Fund will be critical in supporting communities on the frontlines of the climate crisis. Pacific Island countries are already suffering economic and non-economic loss and damage from climate change on a major scale and urgently need access to resources. Australia has played an important leadership role on the loss and damage transitional committee and must now step up and provide a financial contribution of \$100 million, in line with like-minded donors including the US, the European Union, the UK and Canada.

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