

# SUBMISSION ON PRIORITIES FOR THE 2023-24 BUDGET

January 2023

## ABOUT US

**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 serves as the secretariat for the **Australian TB Caucus**, a parliamentary friendship group for MPs with an interest in the prevention and treatment of tuberculosis (TB). Results is part of the **ACTION Global Health Advocacy Partnership**, which supports and empowers organisations across the world to advocate for TB, child health, and nutrition.

[www.results.org.au](http://www.results.org.au)

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This Budget provides an opportunity for Australia to make investments to shape the world for the better. Foreign policy challenges for Australia are immense, and more complex than ever before. The world is witnessing the largest number of violent conflicts since 1946, and a quarter of the global population now lives in conflict-affected countries. With setbacks from COVID-19, global poverty has increased for the first time in a generation and progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) has reversed. The UN's Human Development Index declined for two consecutive years in 2020 and 2021. On health indicators, tuberculosis (TB) deaths and disease also increased during the COVID-19 pandemic. Worldwide, an estimated 10.6 million people fell ill with tuberculosis (TB) in 2021, an increase of 4.5% from 2020.<sup>1</sup>

Australia needs a strong development program that is well-resourced and focused on building partnerships and strengthening health and education in our region. As a good international citizen, Australia's obligation is a moral one. It is in Australia's national interest to cooperate with the international community to tackle the great global challenges in health, climate change and conflict. Changes in Australia's global outlook since May 2022 have seen an emphasis on listening and rebuilding partnerships. International development is an invaluable tool for Australia to advance our reputation in the region, and to be coordinated alongside trade, diplomacy and trade. As a neighbour, Australia respects the sovereignty and strengths of nations in our region. Many countries in the Indo-Pacific have noted, in very clear terms, that the great threat to security and development is climate change. Australia has a responsibility to support countries of the region and fund climate change mitigation and adaptation.

The past decade has shown that pandemic preparedness is essential, and health security threats are not just hypothetical. The global health community responded to the Ebola crisis in 2014 and an outbreak of

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.who.int/teams/global-tuberculosis-programme/tb-reports/global-tuberculosis-report-2022>

MERS in 2015. In our region, we have seen outbreaks of polio and measles and in 2020, COVID-19 led to a health crisis on an unprecedented scale. The UN Secretary-General reminded the world in December that COVID-19 will not be the last pandemic humanity faces, and called on the global community to heed the harsh lessons of COVID-19 and make bold investments in pandemic preparedness, prevention and response.

Since 2017, Australia has stepped-up its leadership role in global health security. Across the Indo-Pacific, Australian aid investments have improved tools and technologies, expanded laboratory capacity and nurtured stronger health workforces. Extending these investments will help to ensure communities and countries are better prepared for health crises in the future. COVID-19 has shown us that investments in health research and development (R&D) can have a significant pay-off. Australia should continue to support partnerships with other countries, the private sector and universities to drive breakthroughs to improve the health and wellbeing of people everywhere. Australia should also work to ensure new tools and treatments overcome access and equity challenges.

With lessons from the response to COVID-19 still fresh, we need to seize opportunities to strengthen health systems and the core services of immunisation, maternal and child health and community-based primary health care. Universal health coverage and health security should be seen as complementary and synergistic.

At times of crisis, women, children and people with disability tend to be impacted most severely. The global food crisis – with impacts on livelihoods and nutrition now most urgent in parts of Africa and the Middle East – demonstrates this clearly. This government has signalled that gender equity and disability inclusion will be priority themes for Australia's aid program moving forward. Investments to deliver on this bold inclusion agenda are the next challenge.

In this submission, Results International (Australia) calls on the Australian Government to make budget allocations to:

- End the TB epidemic
- Strengthen health systems across Southeast Asia and the Pacific
- Increase the volume of Australian aid
- Boost investments to work towards gender equity
- Advance climate justice
- Help fight famine and invest in nutrition.

## SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

<b>1</b>	Increase support for the prevention and treatment of tuberculosis in Papua New Guinea, Indonesia, Timor-Leste and Vietnam and other Indo-Pacific countries with a high burden of TB to build workforce capacity, scale-up case finding and improve detection and treatment.
<b>2</b>	Scale-up Australian investments in TB R&D to meet fair share targets and ensure at least 0.1% of all R&D is directed to TB.
<b>3</b>	Double funding to the NHMRC and expand innovation and discovery in health, working towards a target of 3% of total health expenditure for R&D.
<b>4</b>	Invest in health system strengthening across the region, to expand and rebuild partnerships with governments in Southeast Asia and the Pacific and improve primary health care and immunisation coverage.
<b>5</b>	Increase allocations to the aid program and scale up Official Development Assistance (ODA) spending to work towards a target of 0.5% of GNI by 2030.
<b>6</b>	Commit funding to a loss and damage fund, increase support for community-based mitigation and adaptation, and ramp-up investments in multilateral initiatives such as the Green Climate Fund.
<b>7</b>	Increase investments to advance gender equity in the Indo-Pacific, with funding for community-based programs for women and girls and targeted investments to tackle inequality, such as Investing in Women and the Gender Equality Fund.
<b>8</b>	Commit to a feminist foreign policy and advance a whole of government agenda for equity in the region.
<b>9</b>	Scale-up priority initiatives working to improve health for women and children, including the Global Financing Facility for Women, Children and Adolescents (GFF).
<b>10</b>	Develop a food security strategy, with long-term investments and partnerships to tackle the root causes of the global hunger crisis and improve access to nutrition.
<b>11</b>	Provide a Famine Prevention Package of \$150 million to avert catastrophe in the Horn of Africa, Afghanistan, Syria and Yemen.
<b>12</b>	Invest \$100 million over five years in a regional nutrition initiative, focused on stunting and improving nutrition in Timor-Leste and the Pacific.

## END THE TB EPIDEMIC

Results International (Australia) calls on the government to:

- Increase support for the prevention and treatment of tuberculosis in Papua New Guinea, Indonesia, Timor-Leste and Vietnam and other Indo-Pacific countries with a high burden of TB to build workforce capacity, scale-up case finding and improve detection and treatment.
- Scale-up Australian investments in TB R&D to meet fair share targets and ensure at least 0.1% of all R&D is directed to TB.
- Double funding to the NHMRC and expand innovation and discovery in health, working towards a target of 3% of total health expenditure for R&D.

### The issue

Tuberculosis (TB) is the world's leading cause of death from an infectious disease. It is a disease of poverty and inequality, and a pandemic that has claimed lives for centuries. TB is preventable and treatable. Active case finding, diagnosis, treatment and care help to prevent onward transmission. TB outbreaks present a public health challenge right across our region, with a high burden of cases in Papua New Guinea, Indonesia, Cambodia, Timor-Leste, Vietnam, Myanmar and several Pacific Island countries.

Between 2005 and 2019, the number of new TB cases globally was in decline. But while the world was focussed on battling COVID-19, the TB incidence rate increased. In 2021, 1.6 million people died from TB, including 187 000 people with HIV. In 2021, an estimated 10.6 million people fell ill with TB. TB affects men more than women.

Malnutrition seriously impacts treatment and recovery. As an airborne disease, TB spreads where there is crowding and poor ventilation. In low- and middle-income countries across the Indo-Pacific, TB infections lead to large losses in labour supply and household income.

TB has long been underfunded commensurate to need, and is often neglected in science and development. Globally TB prevention relies on the century-old Bacille Calmette Guérin (BCG) vaccine. While BCG offers some protection against the most severe forms of TB, including TB meningitis in infants and young children, the vaccine is mostly ineffective in adolescents and adults who are most at risk of developing and spreading TB.

Tools and treatments to prevent and treat TB are improving, and exciting developments in drugs, diagnostics and vaccines present new opportunities. There are currently 16 candidate vaccines in development for TB. At the World Economic Forum this year, WHO's Director-General Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus spoke on the importance of high-level coordination and stronger investments in better vaccines and treatments for TB. COVID-19 proved that innovative and effective health interventions can be delivered fast if they are prioritised politically and adequately financed. We can do the same to end TB.

Fair share funding targets provide a metric to evaluate contributions to TB research. Specifically, a fair share is when a country can demonstrate that at least 0.1% of overall research and development expenditures is directed to R&D for TB. Ireland, South Africa, the US, the UK, the Philippines and the Netherlands have all met their fair share funding targets for TB R&D, or come close. Using the fair share metric, Australia is one of many countries that falls short with only 67% or \$20 million in annual funding for TB recorded in 2021.

## The opportunity

Australia has always punched above its weight in research and innovation for global health. In the last 80 years, 11 Australians have been awarded a Nobel Prize for contributions to a better understanding of human health and disease. This budget should include a plan to double funding to the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC). The NHMRC's grants and partnerships enable researchers to test and trial public health solutions and better clinical practice. Insights gained through NHMRC investments are key to tackling the disease challenges of the future. Australia's current investment in health and medical research is roughly 0.7% of total health expenditure. In this budget Australia should work to steadily lift investments and ramp up funding to 3% of total health expenditure for health and medical research in the long-term.

New TB vaccines that work across all age groups, particularly adults and adolescents, will be critical in managing the TB pandemic in the future. The pipeline of candidate vaccines for TB has never been stronger, with at least five vaccines in phase III trials and work underway to develop next-generation vaccines based on mRNA and other promising platforms.

The good news is that after years of decline, global financing for TB research and development (R&D) is trending upward and reached USD 1 billion for the first time ever in 2021. However, this figure represents half of the target set at the UN High-Level Meeting on TB in 2018. At that meeting, Australia and other member states committed to mobilise sufficient and sustainable financing for TB, with the aim of increasing overall investments to USD 2 billion. In September 2023, member states will meet for a second High-Level meeting on TB and will review critical targets ahead of the 2030 deadline.

## The impact

In the global response to HIV and COVID-19, the benefits from partnerships in health innovation have provided remarkable breakthroughs in the way we think about prevention and treatment. Investing in Product Development Partnerships (PDP) is a cost-effective way to drive global health and public health preparedness and support innovation. DFAT's own evaluation of PDPs in 2017 found that the investment was successful in progressing products that meet identified diagnostic and treatment needs and was good value for money.<sup>2</sup> Australia has supported TB Alliance through a PDP for five years, and this investment has led to the development and regulatory approval of a three-drug, six-month, all-oral treatment regimen for drug-resistant TB. This regimen has been a game-changer, and has demonstrated what can be accomplished through long-term, sustained investments in research and development. We need innovative and flexible funding for vaccine development, and partnerships that bring together governments and the private sector.

Australian participation and leadership will be critical, and will bring massive reputational gains. According to the Australian Society for Medical Research, every dollar invested in health and medical research returns over \$3 to the economy.<sup>3</sup> Medical research is a significant employer and investments have major flow-on benefits for higher education, clinical practice and local development and manufacturing of pharmaceuticals.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.dfat.gov.au/sites/default/files/final-pdp-evaluation-and-options.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> <https://asmr.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/2022-Election-Position-Document.pdf>

## STRENGTHEN HEALTH SYSTEMS ACROSS SOUTHEAST ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

Results International (Australia) calls on the government to:

- Invest in health system strengthening across the region, to expand and rebuild partnerships with governments in Southeast Asia and the Pacific and improve primary health care and immunisation coverage.

### The issue

Health is critical to development in countries of Asia and the Pacific. Diseases of poverty, such as TB, polio, AIDS and malaria continue to hold back progress in low and middle and income countries. To end poverty, we will need to expand access to quality health care services and ensure people can thrive. COVID-19 exposed massive gaps in health systems and demonstrated how much health matters to our economies. The clearest collective lesson we have learnt since 2020 is that strong health systems are key to the development of communities in our region.

Immunisation coverage dropped for the first time in 10 years, and coverage rates for measles and polio are now patchy in many countries. Across Asia and the Pacific, challenges remain in the provision of safe maternal healthcare, access to family planning and care for people living with chronic diseases. Workforce challenges will continue, and will be key to ensuring quality care. Globally, the COVID-19 pandemic claimed the lives of 115,500 front-line health workers in the first 18 months of the pandemic.<sup>4</sup>

### The opportunity

By partnering with governments and community-based organisations in the Indo-Pacific, Australia can make investments to expand access to quality health services. In decades past, Australia has been a valued partner in the development of health systems across the region. Australian experts in public health have helped to build services and train health workers. Many countries in Asia and the Pacific have developed plans to work towards universal health coverage (UHC), where all people can receive the good-quality health services they need without facing financial hardship from having to pay for them. Australia's own experience in building universal health care systems should be shared to make Health For All a reality in the region. Australia has been a world-leader in showing the benefits of HPV vaccination. In recent years, the Australian Government and Australian clinical leaders have championed the expansion of screening and treatment through GAVI The Vaccine Alliance and initiatives of Australia's aid program. Australian leadership on health has had a formidable impact in the region.

Shifts in the development agenda since 2014 have seen Australia's health footprint, particularly in Southeast Asia, reduced. Working with partners in our region to identify gaps and strengths, DFAT should look to build targeted bilateral support programs to strengthen systems in Indonesia, Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos and Myanmar. Australia's existing health programs in the Pacific, Timor-Leste and other countries of Southeast Asia have proven critical, particularly since 2020.

### The impact

With closer dialogue, stewardship and greater investments, Australia can reclaim its role as a key partner of choice for health assistance in Southeast Asia. Across the region, progress against the indicators contained within SGD3 has been slow, and were set-back during the response to COVID. Looking to 2030, the UN lists top priorities for the region such as mental health, road safety, reduction in household

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<sup>4</sup> <https://news.un.org/en/story/2022/02/1112352>

health expenditure and increasing the capacity to provide health services.<sup>5</sup> Challenges vary greatly across countries, Rising rates of non-communicable diseases, such as heart disease, cancer and stroke are common in many parts of the region. Australia can also provide assistance in the management of infectious diseases, such as TB and malaria. Aid investments from Australia can address inadequate access to nutrition and hygiene and improve access to safe drinking water and sanitation. Through dialogue and partnership, Australia can make investments to strengthen health systems and improve policies to work towards UHC.

## INCREASE THE VOLUME OF AUSTRALIAN AID

Results International (Australia) calls on the government to:

- Increase allocations to the aid program and scale up Official Development Assistance (ODA) spending to work towards a target of 0.5% of GNI by 2030.

### The issue

The past decade has seen savage cuts to the aid program, which have hampered our development capability, halted progress and affected relationships with partners. In 2021, Australia's aid generosity ranking among OECD countries dropped to 21, with 0.22% of Australia's GNI allocated to ODA. For the first time in more than a decade, the Government has made a commitment to increasing the amount Australia spends on Official Development Assistance (ODA). In late 2022, the Government announced a 1.4 billion dollar increase to ODA over the forward estimates. This funding was a welcome leap forward and will help to stabilise the program and rebuild critical partnerships.

Investments need to go much further to meet challenges in our region, and globally. Even with this increase, Australia's aid allocation will remain at just 0.2% of GNI – well below the 0.7% target – and is still projected to decrease in future years when adjusting for inflation.<sup>6</sup> The 0.7% target has been the gold standard for ODA since its formal recognition at the UNGA in 1970.<sup>7</sup>

The Labor party has committed to achieving a funding target for the international development program of at least 0.5 per cent of GNI and to increasing aid as a percentage of GNI every. This government needs to act on that ambition and develop a staged plan to grow aid allocations in the short-term.

### The opportunity

In this budget, the government should increase allocations to the aid program and scale up ODA to 0.33% by 2026-27. This puts Australia in an average position next to other donors on the OECD Development Assistance Committee. Looking ahead, Australia should plan to increase ODA to 0.5% of GNI as soon as possible. This is still below the most ambitious target of 0.7%, which set the context for development commitments in the 1970s and the Millennium Development Goals in 2005. We acknowledge that reaching these targets will be difficult given competing budgetary priorities and need to incrementally scale-up Australian aid. As we have outlined in this submission, the great global challenges of our time call for bold and comprehensive solutions. Small investments will not achieve the change and progress that is required to improve global health and end global poverty.

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.unescap.org/kp/2022/asia-and-pacific-sdg-progress-report-2022>

<sup>6</sup> <https://devpolicy.org/labor-aid-budget-20221026/>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.oecd.org/dac/financing-sustainable-development/development-finance-standards/ODA-history-of-the-0-7-target.pdf>



## The impact

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,<sup>8</sup> the moral case for increasing ODA is complemented by a compelling argument on the basis of national interest. A key return on strong ODA investments is the reputational advantage. The way Australia is seen by other countries is fundamentally important in determining how well we succeed in advancing and protecting our own 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 the Indo-Pacific region has slipped. In Southeast Asia, Australia is facing a 'fateful decline'<sup>9</sup> and needs to re-engage. As commentators suggest, Australia must 'turbo-charge programs to build connections to decision-makers and young leaders'.<sup>10</sup> In Pacific Island countries, inaction on climate change has undermined trust and confidence. The government is listening, and has taken welcome steps to rebuild regional relations. Further increases to the aid program, with investments in health and education, would be a clear way for Australia to demonstrate a genuine commitment in Southeast Asia and the Pacific.

## ADVANCE CLIMATE JUSTICE

Results International (Australia) calls on the government to:

- Commit funding to a loss and damage fund, increase support for community-based mitigation and adaptation, and ramp-up investments in multilateral initiatives such as the Green Climate Fund.

## The issue

Climate change is the single biggest health threat facing humanity. The climate crisis threatens to undo decades of progress in development, global health and poverty reduction, and will widen existing health inequalities. After a decade of stalled progress, it is encouraging to see this government accepting the science and recognising the climate emergency. Australia needs to act to reduce emissions and address the impacts of natural disasters and rising sea levels, particularly in Pacific Island countries. In line with our ambitions for global health equity, Results emphasises the importance of ambitious emissions reductions and an approach centred on climate justice.

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.<sup>11</sup> Increased temperatures and rainfall make it easier for mosquito-borne and waterborne diseases to spread, such as dengue fever and malaria. Standing water in the aftermath of the widespread flooding in Pakistan in 2022, and cyclones in Mozambique the year prior, provided a breeding ground for malaria-transmitting mosquitoes that led to a surge in malaria cases. Heavy seasonal rains routinely lead to outbreaks of dengue fever in Asia and the Pacific. Worldwide, the incidence of dengue has increased 30-fold over the past 50 years; more than 70% of people at risk of dengue are in this region.<sup>12</sup> TB is also indirectly affected

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mOYP3E7S91o>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2022-07-20/australia-and-south-east-asia-s-fateful-decade-china-influence/101251510>

<sup>10</sup> <https://asiasociety.org/australia/australia-and-southeast-asias-fateful-decade>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41558-022-01426-1>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.who.int/westernpacific/news/item/11-06-2019-dengue-increase-likely-during-rainy-season-who-warns>

by climate change, with rising temperatures and unstable climate patterns raising the likelihood of TB risk factors such as overcrowding, diabetes, undernutrition and overall poverty.<sup>13</sup>

To tackle global climate change and global poverty, an approach that foregrounds climate justice is important. Concerted efforts by Australia, and all countries, to accelerate the transition away from fossil fuels are necessary to limit the impacts of climate change. It is also important to acknowledge the historical context of greenhouse gas emissions. High-income countries such as Australia were the first to undergo industrialisation and have contributed more atmospheric pollution than developing countries, especially on a per-capita basis. With increasingly unpredictable and extreme weather events, low- and middle-income communities will face the greatest struggles to rebuild. Disruptions to agriculture make it even harder to access nutritious food and stave off malnutrition. While it is essential for all countries to collaborate on climate change mitigation, vulnerable communities are already starting to see the impacts of climate change. Despite these ongoing challenges, only 7% of global funds to climate change are directed towards climate adaptation.<sup>14</sup>

Due to decades of insufficient climate action, climate justice encourages righting this historic wrong by investing urgently to build resilience against the impacts of climate change and supporting emissions mitigations in the short to medium-term.

## The opportunity

Finally, we are seeing world leaders willing to work together to build a consensus and take action on climate. Australian participation and support in global climate action has been well received. At the COP27 summit in Egypt last year, agreement was reached for the establishment of a loss and damage financing mechanism. Acknowledging Australia's historically high per capita greenhouse gas emissions, the government should plan for contributions to the loss and damage mechanism that aligns with our fair share.

The government should also restore and increase its provision of grants to trusted global multilaterals working for climate justice, such as the Green Climate Fund. In a short time, the Green Climate Fund has achieved commendable results and has already provided funding worth \$860 million for countries in Southeast Asia and \$464 million in nations of the Pacific.<sup>15</sup> Further support for the Green Climate Fund would help the development and implementation of projects to address the impacts of climate change on communities around the world. Additionally, Australia should increase support to locally-led regional climate funding bodies, such as the Pacific Resilience Facility. In doing so, the resources provided by Australia will be directed towards the organisations and initiatives best equipped to address the specific needs and challenges faced by communities in the region. By supporting global and locally-led efforts, Australia can play a meaningful role in advancing climate justice and protecting communities in low and middle income countries of our region from the impacts of climate change.

## The impact

As a nation, we are on the way to becoming a renewable energy superpower<sup>16</sup> and will be able to offer solutions and innovations for growth in the region. Australian leadership and partnership on climate will

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<sup>13</sup> <https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/davos-2023-climate-change-leads-more-malaria-tuberculosis-up-recession-2023-01-16/>; <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0013935122007630>

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.climatepolicyinitiative.org/publication/global-landscape-of-climate-finance-2021/>

<sup>15</sup> [https://www.greenclimate.fund/countries?f\[\]=field\\_country%253Afield\\_region:319](https://www.greenclimate.fund/countries?f[]=field_country%253Afield_region:319)

<sup>16</sup>

[https://www.aph.gov.au/About\\_Parliament/House\\_of\\_Representatives/About\\_the\\_House\\_News/Media\\_Releases/Australias\\_transition\\_to\\_a\\_green\\_energy\\_superpower](https://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/House_of_Representatives/About_the_House_News/Media_Releases/Australias_transition_to_a_green_energy_superpower)

be key as we prepare a bid to host, with Pacific countries, the UN Climate Summit in 2026. Australia has a chance to emerge as a leader for climate justice. A Transitional Committee is developing options for the structure and budget of the loss and damage fund. Noting the massive investment gap for climate change adaptation in low and middle-income countries, a loss and damage fund will aim to collect resources from donor governments in proportion to their historic emissions. As a result, countries that could not otherwise afford the equipment and R&D needed to adapt to threats from climate change will have an opportunity to guard against these impacts. Rising sea levels, extreme weather events, and crop failures are a particular concern to our neighbours in the Pacific and Southeast Asia. Contributing our fair share to the loss and damage fund will ensure that Australia plays its part in helping communities of the Indo-Pacific to adapt to climate change and avoid sliding further into poverty.

## **BOOST INVESTMENTS TO WORK TOWARDS GENDER EQUITY**

Results International (Australia) calls on the government to:

- Increase investments to advance gender equity in the Indo-Pacific, with funding for community-based programs for women and girls and targeted investments to tackle inequality, such as Investing in Women and the Gender Equality Fund.
- Commit to a feminist foreign policy and advance a whole of government agenda for equity in the region.
- Scale-up in priority initiatives working to improve health for women and children, including the Global Financing Facility for Women, Children and Adolescents (GFF).

### **The issue**

Gender shapes all aspects of health and wellbeing. Gender affects exposure to risk and has an impact on the way people access services. Women's health services across the Indo-Pacific, already poorly funded, have faced major disruptions. Through the COVID-19 pandemic we have seen women struggle with the constraints of lost jobs and livelihoods, derailed schooling and increased burdens of unpaid care work at home. Violence against women remains endemic and evidence from many contexts suggests this violence has been exacerbated by the pandemic.

Women make up 70 percent of the global health workforce. However, female health workers remain underrepresented in highly skilled occupations, such as surgery and in leadership roles. The world is not on track to achieve gender equality by 2030, and the social and economic fallout from the pandemic has made the situation even bleaker.

Diseases of poverty place a disproportionate burden on women and girls. An estimated 388 million women and girls live in extreme poverty. In our region, gender inequality holds communities back. 34.3% of all women in Pacific Island countries live in poverty and in the Pacific, levels of female political leadership are the lowest in the world. In response to COVID-19, the livelihoods of women were disproportionately affected, with women experiencing greater unemployment and economic insecurity.

### **The opportunity**

Australia has already committed to gender equality through the National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security, the work of the Ambassador for Women and Girls and through programs such as Investing in Women and Water for Women. These provide a foundation to do much more. Australia's development program should aim to promote and embed gender equality, particularly in the design and delivery of health programs. The systemic barriers faced by women and gender-diverse people worldwide in

accessing health services, quality education and employment opportunities increase risks of poverty, especially through crises such as natural disasters, climate change and COVID-19. A feminist foreign policy — as Canada, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Chile and Germany have implemented — would provide a framework for Australia to help transform global systems and enable women, everywhere, to realise their full potential.

With the October budget, Australia reinstated the target for 80% of development investments to effectively address gender equality, as well as a new requirement that all large programs include gender equality as a significant or principal objective. These will be welcome measures to advance the mainstreaming of gender across the aid program, an approach which has long been recognised as critical for the effectiveness of aid. Targeted gender-focused investments should not be forgotten; DFAT's commitment to gender quality requires a twin-track approach.<sup>17</sup> Given the slow progress in the region against SDG5, gaps in economic and political participation, and pervasive trends in violence against women and girls,<sup>18</sup> there is a clear case for expanded funding and bolder strategies.

Australia has an opportunity to join the global community in funding existing multilateral initiatives to improve health outcomes for women and young people. The Global Financing Facility for Women, Children and Adolescents (GFF) was launched by the World Bank in 2015 to increase the total volume of financing for maternal, newborn and child health. Focused on sexual and reproductive health and rights, newborn survival and adolescent health, the GFF works to harness expertise and financial resources to improve health outcomes for women and children. Contributing to the GFF would align with Australia's regional priorities, given the GFF's support for governments and community-based initiatives in Indonesia, Vietnam, and Cambodia.<sup>19</sup> As regular donors Canada, Norway, the UK, the Netherlands, Germany and Japan have joined private donors to raise a total of USD 2.5 billion.<sup>20</sup> The Women Deliver Conference<sup>21</sup> in July this year will provide a chance for Australia to pledge support for the GFF and commit to health equity for women and girls. With an initial pledge of at least \$10 million, Australia could make an important contribution to a global initiative working to improve equity.

## The impact

In this budget, Australia has an opportunity to uplift women's and children's health in our region and beyond. Working for greater equality and equity can be transformative. Gender equality boosts economies and can break cycles of conflict to lay a solid foundation for peace. Decades of experience in development programming, from microfinance to investments in leadership, have proven that women are key to effectiveness and sustainability in aid. Growing evidence confirms that placing women at the centre of development activities can increase efficiency and multiply our gains.

## HELP FIGHT FAMINE AND INVEST IN NUTRITION

Results International (Australia) calls on the government to:

- Develop a food security strategy, with long-term investments and partnerships to tackle the root causes of the global hunger crisis and improve access to nutrition.

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.dfat.gov.au/publications/development/gender-equality-and-womens-empowerment-aid-program>

<sup>18</sup> <https://knowledge.unasiapacific.org/sdgs/sdg5-gender-equality>

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.globalfinancingfacility.org/indonesia>; <https://www.globalfinancingfacility.org/vietnam>; <https://www.globalfinancingfacility.org/cambodia>

<sup>20</sup> [https://www.globalfinancingfacility.org/sites/gff\\_new/files/gff-partnership-annual-report-2021-2022.pdf](https://www.globalfinancingfacility.org/sites/gff_new/files/gff-partnership-annual-report-2021-2022.pdf)

<sup>21</sup> <https://womendeliver.org/case-studies/global-financing-facility/>

- Provide a Famine Prevention Package of \$150 million to avert catastrophe in the Horn of Africa, Afghanistan, Syria and Yemen.
- Invest \$100 million over five years in a regional nutrition initiative, focused on stunting and improving nutrition in Timor-Leste and the Pacific.

## The issue

As the Foreign Minister noted at the UN General Assembly last September, the global food security crisis is increasingly grave. More than 50 million people across 45 countries remain on the brink of famine. This is a crisis of historic proportions, worsened by climate change, COVID-19 and the protracted conflict in Ukraine.<sup>21</sup> Without access to food and good nutrition, people are unable to reach their full potential and the cycle of poverty and inequality continues within families, communities and countries. Of those with chronic hunger, almost two thirds are women and girls. Malnutrition is directly or indirectly responsible for approximately half of the 5.5 million deaths of children under the age of five each year, making it one of the largest causes of child mortality.

Countries in Asia and the Pacific have some of the highest rates of malnutrition in the world. Stunting and anaemia are the most prevalent forms of malnutrition in the Pacific.<sup>23</sup> 49.5% of children in Papua New Guinea and 51.7% of children in Timor-Leste<sup>22</sup> are affected by stunting. Prematurity, pneumonia and diarrhoea are the Pacific's top childhood killers and undernutrition is a catalyst.

Hunger isn't the only issue. While 462 million of the world's adults are underweight, nearly two billion are overweight. In the Pacific, challenges in accessing nutrient-rich foods such as fruit and vegetables means the prevalence of excess weight and obesity in adults exceeds 60%.<sup>23</sup> These contrasts demonstrate the complexity of nutrition and food security challenges in our region. Links between trade systems, agriculture, changes in climate, access to quality health information, affordability and inflation all have an impact.

Australia's annual expenditure in nutrition-specific programming is modest; just \$300,000 was reported by DFAT in 2020-21.<sup>24</sup> Most of Australia's ODA expenditure on nutrition is provided in humanitarian assistance and food aid for crises and conflicts.

## The opportunity

DFAT's current Health and Development Strategy (adopted in 2015) includes nutrition as a priority for future health investment. The strategy notes that good nutrition in early life lays the foundation for good health and productivity in later life, and that investments in good nutrition today are investments in the economic markets of tomorrow.

Recognising that nutrition cuts across trade, agriculture, health and development sectors, Australia directs nutrition investment and policy with a multisectoral lens. Building on this, a Food Security Strategy would help to deepen partnerships across government, advance trade goals and demonstrate leadership and compassion. To build resilience against famine and natural disasters, Australia should facilitate partnerships that build on local strengths and share learnings between countries of our region. Australia has a proud history of support for nutrition and food security, through pilots and projects led by the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research and effective interventions delivered

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<sup>22</sup> <https://devpolicy.org/shifting-the-dial-on-child-malnutrition-in-pacific-timor-leste-20220907/>

<sup>23</sup> Overweight and obesity in the Western Pacific Region. Manila, Philippines. World Health Organization Regional Office for the Western Pacific; 2017

<sup>24</sup> Australia's Official Development Assistance Statistical Summary 2020-21 p38.

through bilateral health programs. A Food Security Strategy would help prevent humanitarian suffering before it reaches catastrophic levels and capitalise on Australian strengths in agricultural innovation.

To respond to nutrition challenges in our region, Australia should fund a program for Timor-Leste and countries of the Pacific to focus on malnutrition and improve access to healthy food. This would highlight Australia's support to end stunting and undernutrition in the region and demonstrate commitment to helping address a long-running development challenge for the region.

## The impact

Taking action on nutrition is consistent with Australia's aid objectives of promoting sustained economic growth and improving health and education, particularly for women and girls. Nutrition, along with water, sanitation and hygiene, has a major impact on health outcomes at a community and national level. Nutrition and food security is fundamental to the growth of economies, communities and individuals. With adequate nutrients a child has the best chance to develop to their full cognitive potential, do well at school and ultimately thrive.