September 15, 2014

The Honorable Rajiv Shah
Administrator
U.S. Agency for International Development
1300 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20523

Dear Administrator Shah,

As organizations working to end preventable maternal and child deaths, we are writing to express our support for the appointment of an empowered Maternal and Child Health (MCH) Coordinator, as recommended by the ACES Blue Ribbon Advisory Panel. The appointment of an MCH Coordinator, in conjunction with other reforms outlined in the Panel’s memo and the sharpened focus reflected in the Acting on the Call report, can accelerate U.S. efforts to end preventable maternal and child deaths.

The President’s Malaria Initiative (PMI) provides a successful model within USAID of focused, empowered leadership to achieve health outcomes. Like the Global Malaria Coordinator, the MCH Coordinator must have a clear mandate and work in close coordination with the Administrator, and with the full support of the Administration. In establishing this position, we urge you to consider the following recommendations:

**Budget Authority.** The MCH Coordinator should have meaningful control over budgets to allocate funding among priority countries and interventions, respond to urgent challenges and bottlenecks, and seize opportunities to accelerate progress on ending preventable maternal and child deaths (EPMCD). The Coordinator should have the authority to approve grants, cooperative agreements, and contracts, and to align current, future, and existing instruments with high-impact interventions to save lives.

The MCH Coordinator’s authority should extend to resources within the Global Health budget with the most direct impact on maternal and child mortality. In addition to core resources funded under Maternal and Child Health, this should include high impact WASH and direct nutrition interventions delivered through the health sector, and family planning programs related to the healthy timing and spacing of pregnancies. The Coordinator’s authority should also extend to the significant USAID MCH resources beyond the Global Health budget, particularly Economic Support Fund resources in priority EPMCD countries.

**Targets, Transparency, and Accountability.** The MCH Coordinator should lead USAID in setting ambitious and measurable goals and targets at the global, country, and project levels related to ending preventable maternal and child deaths.

The Coordinator should ensure that projects include measurable targets on outcomes necessary to achieve the end of preventable maternal and child deaths, such as increased coverage of proven interventions and strengthened health systems. Data on progress against these targets should be collected and reported on at least an annual basis. As part of this effort, the Coordinator should continue the work of streamlining monitoring and evaluation so that valid and reliable results can be
aggregated and reported annually across countries. This reporting is critical to effectively communicating progress and sustaining support for these investments. In support of the Administrator, the Coordinator should serve as a central point of public and congressional accountability for USAID’s efforts to end preventable maternal and child deaths.

**Country Coordination.** The MCH Coordinator should oversee the development of, and ultimately approve, USAID Health Implementation Plans in priority countries. To facilitate this process and provide ongoing coordination, USAID should designate an MCH focal point in each of the 24 high-priority countries, and the Coordinator should have the authority to allocate staff among these countries. The Coordinator should also ensure global and in-country coordination between USAID efforts and other U.S. health investments, including PMI, Feed the Future, and PEPFAR.

**Global Coordination.** This position should ensure U.S. investments in maternal and child health complement and leverage the investments of our bilateral and multilateral partners, including UNICEF, the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, and Gavi.

**Public Advocate.** While the most important role of the Coordinator will be the management of USAID investments in EPMCD, this role also has the opportunity to serve as a champion and advocate for ending preventable child and maternal deaths with the public, Congress, and within the Administration.

USAID’s leadership has forged a global consensus that ending preventable maternal and child deaths is possible – and imperative. The appointment of an MCH Coordinator with the authority and mandate to accelerate progress is an important next step in maximizing U.S. leadership in achieving this goal. We look forward to continuing to work with you to make this vision a reality, and to support the role of an empowered MCH Coordinator.

Sincerely,