

## Improve world health care by increasing prosperity

By WILLIAM H. FRIST, M.D.

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While politicians debate health care reform on the floors of the U.S. Congress, the world's poor pace dirt floors in villages worldwide engaged in their own health care debate. As Americans work to chart the future of health care here at home, our compassion also extends to the poor around the world who face the most fundamental of health concerns. Imagine what is running through the minds of the world's poor today. Will their children be among the 12,500 to die this very day from preventable and treatable causes, like pneumonia or diarrhea? Can they afford a simple bed net to safeguard against the malaria-carrying bite of a mosquito? Will they die in childbirth? How will they pick up anti-retroviral medication if seasonal rains wash away the only path that leads to the nearest health clinic?

The U.S. government clearly understands the importance of a global health care strategy that boosts global economic prosperity for all. Healthy people drive the ingenuity, creativity, and growth of economies around the world. Any strategy must emphasize treatment as much as prevention. It must address immediate needs as well as long-term health goals. It must require an innovative, smarter perspective on global health that looks at entire health systems through integrated and coordinated lenses to deliver sustainable solutions for the world's poor and sick.

What are the implications for poor communities worldwide? It means looking at the symptoms as well as the systemic causes. America's support can deliver medicines that heal a child infected with malaria or tuberculosis, but if the communal water well is contaminated with diseases, she will fall ill again and again. We can renovate and modernize a health clinic, but without functioning roads or bridges, those who provide or need the clinic's services will fail to reach it. We can expand health services in poor communities, but if the process of procuring those services is undermined by corruption and a lack of transparency, lifesaving resources meant for the sick are diverted.

Global health is as much about putting health infrastructure in place as it is improving the physical infrastructure (roads and water systems) and the institutional capacity (sound policies and training) developing countries need to keep their citizens healthy. We need it all. This integrated approach is the surest way to sustainably improve the alarming state of global health, where 9 million children die before their fifth birthday or one in every 250 mothers die giving birth.

U.S. assistance delivered through mechanisms like the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC), for example, takes such a holistic approach to health in the developing world. MCC partners with countries working to pursue sound policies to strengthen the capacity of their health sectors. It funds country-determined anti-poverty projects that view healthy, productive societies as vital to sustainable economic development. MCC's partnership with Mongolia, for instance, tackles non-communicable diseases because they are a major cause of death among working-aged Mongolians, decreasing national productivity. MCC's partnership with Cape Verde built new roads, and also educated the communities alongside them about HIV/AIDS prevention. Irrigation projects funded by MCC to boost agricultural productivity and food security are designed to mitigate the health impacts of water-related diseases too. MCC is partnering with the Global Health Council next week to convene a groundbreaking forum to look at health care for the poor from a systems-wide, multidimensional approach. Delivering development assistance to address the core causes of poor global health and prevent the reoccurrence of the symptoms is cost-effective. And, during these tough economic times, it makes supreme sense to stretch the value of every U.S. dollar invested in global health in this accountable way.

As the health care reform debate unfolds domestically, we face an opportune moment to recalculate for the better how we maximize the success of our efforts abroad to strengthen global health. By looking holistically at global health systems — the capacity, the policies, the health and non-health infrastructure — we can pursue integrated action on all the components that go into making and keeping the world's poor healthy. For their sake and ours, let us seize this moment to do so.

*Frist is a former senator from Tennessee and was the U.S. Senate majority leader from 2003-2007. He is a member of the Millennium Challenge Corporation's Board of Directors.*