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The case for investing in family planning in the Pacific

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Key Messages

- Universal access to family planning has not been prioritised or adequately funded in the Pacific. Use of modern contraception is low in this region and unmet need for family planning is among the highest in the world.
- Meeting the need for family planning in the Pacific would save lives. Reducing unmet need in Vanuatu and the Solomon Islands would reduce unintended pregnancies by more than 50% and high-risk births by more than 20%, saving over 2,500 lives in the next 16 years.
- Preventing unintended pregnancies would also increase household wealth, reduce the burden on resources and save \$112 million in public expenditure over the next 16 years.
- Meeting all family planning needs will cost \$8.6 million over the next 16 years. However, for every \$1 spent on family planning, between \$9-16 would be saved in public expenditure. Increasing investment in family planning would make the Pacific's health and development goals more sustainable.

Background

The ability to decide freely the number and timing of children is a fundamental human right. Ensuring that adolescent girls and women can plan their pregnancies is also one of the most cost-effective investments a country can make towards sustainable development. Meeting the global demand for family planning would reduce maternal deaths by 30% and child deaths by 20%, and contributes to the empowerment of women and girls, universal education and poverty reduction.¹⁻³

Progress to ensure that all women and adolescent girls in the Pacific have access to family planning has been slow and inequitable. In many countries fewer than 35% of married women are using an effective method of contraception and up to 46% want to avoid pregnancy but are not using any method of family planning.⁴ This unmet need is among the highest in the world, yet family planning in this region continues to be under-prioritised and under-funded. This has been due in part to limited region-specific analysis of the resources required to reduce unmet need and the potential impacts to support policy and planning.

The Burnet Institute, in partnership with Family Planning International, conducted analyses in Vanuatu and the Solomon Islands to identify the costs and health, demographic and economic impacts of meeting all family planning needs by 2020. These costs and benefits were projected over a 16 year period: 2010-2025.



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POLICY BRIEF

Key findings

Compared with no progress, meeting all the need for family planning by 2020 would have substantial benefits for the health of women and children:

- The use of effective methods of contraception would increase by a third in Solomon Islands and would almost double in Vanuatu. By 2025, 25,000 more women and couples would be using a modern method of contraception.
- The number of unintended pregnancies and induced abortions would fall by 50% in the Solomon Islands and 68% in Vanuatu, preventing around 5,200 unintended pregnancies every year.
- Births with a high risk for the health of mothers and babies would decrease by 20% in the Solomon Islands and 52% in Vanuatu. High-risk births include births to women aged less than 19 and over 34 years, births spaced less than 24 months apart, and births of more than four children.
- More than 2,500 deaths of women and children would be prevented between 2010-2025. The number of maternal deaths would fall by 12% in the Solomon Islands and 39% in Vanuatu. Infant deaths would decrease by 20% in the Solomon Islands and 54% in Vanuatu, enabling Vanuatu to meet its MDG target by 2016.

In addition, enabling women to prevent unintended pregnancies would:

- Reduce the total fertility rate and slow annual population growth from 2.5% to 2.2% in the Solomon Islands and to 1.4% in Vanuatu.
- Reduce the youth dependency ratio from 67 people aged 0-14 years per 100 people of working age to 58 in the Solomon Islands and 39 in Vanuatu, contributing to increased household wealth. Reducing youth dependency would provide an opportunity to capitalise on the large population of young people, which has been shown to contribute to rapid economic growth.

Meeting the demand for family planning would cost \$8.6 million (\$5.2 million in Vanuatu and \$3.4 million in Solomon Islands) over the next 16 years. However, this investment would have significant returns, saving \$112 million in public expenditure on health and education between 2010-2025. For every \$1 spent on family planning, \$9-16 would be saved. Increasing investment in family planning would make health and development goals more achievable, more affordable and more sustainable.

Policy recommendations

- Increased and long-term financial commitment to family planning from government and donors is required to meet the needs of women and couples in the Pacific. At least \$1.5 million for Vanuatu and \$1 million for the Solomon Islands is required over the next 5 years to meet these needs by 2020.
- Recognising the human rights, health and development imperatives, reducing unmet need for family planning should be prioritised in reproductive health, maternal and child health and population policies and programs.
- Clear and realistic targets for reducing unmet need for family planning should be developed based on current and projected needs and adequate budget provided to enable these goals to be achieved.

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