

Preconception care: Maximizing the gains for maternal and child health

World Health Organization



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Facts

- 4 out of 10 women report that their pregnancies are unplanned
- Perinatal deaths are 50% higher among babies born to adolescent mothers
- Up to 10% of pregnancies among women with untreated gonococcal infections result in perinatal death

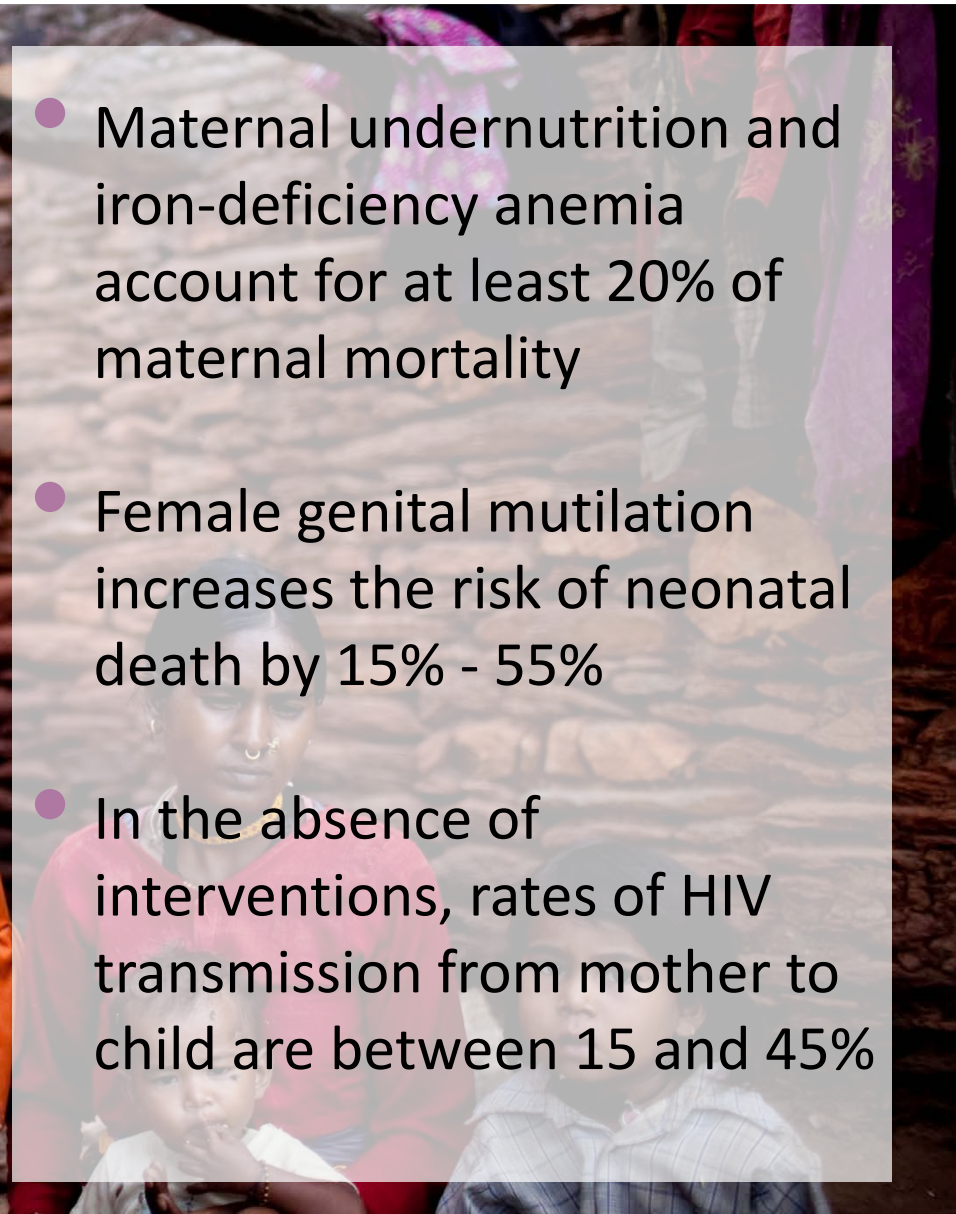




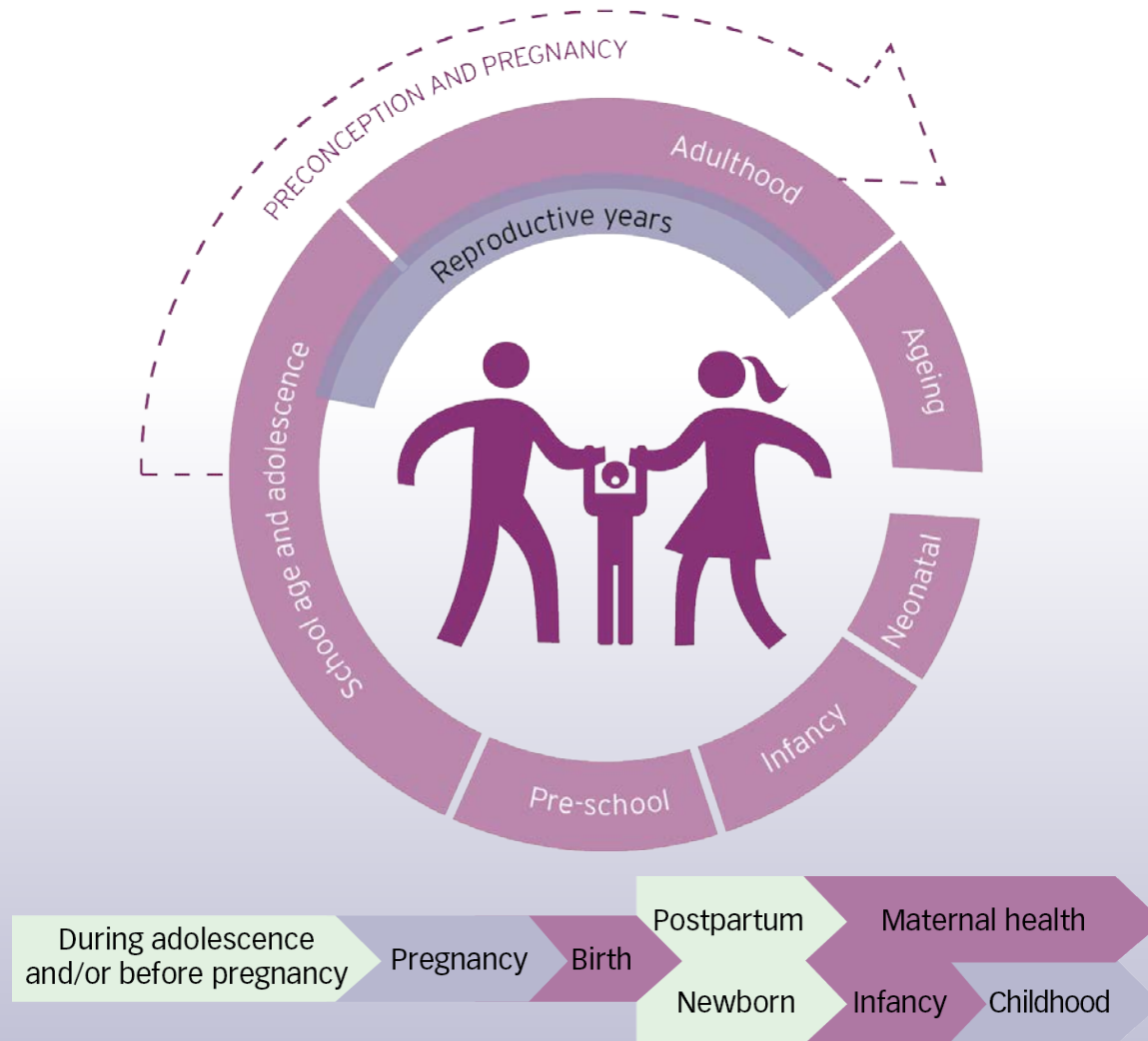
Facts



- Maternal undernutrition and iron-deficiency anemia account for at least 20% of maternal mortality
- Female genital mutilation increases the risk of neonatal death by 15% - 55%
- In the absence of interventions, rates of HIV transmission from mother to child are between 15 and 45%



Life course – when to intervene?



What is preconception care?

Preconception care is the provision of biomedical, behavioral and social health interventions to women and couples before conception occurs.

What is its aim?

- Aims at improving health status and reducing behaviors and individual and environmental factors that could contribute to poor maternal and child health outcomes.
- Its ultimate aim is improved maternal and child health outcomes, in both the short and long term.





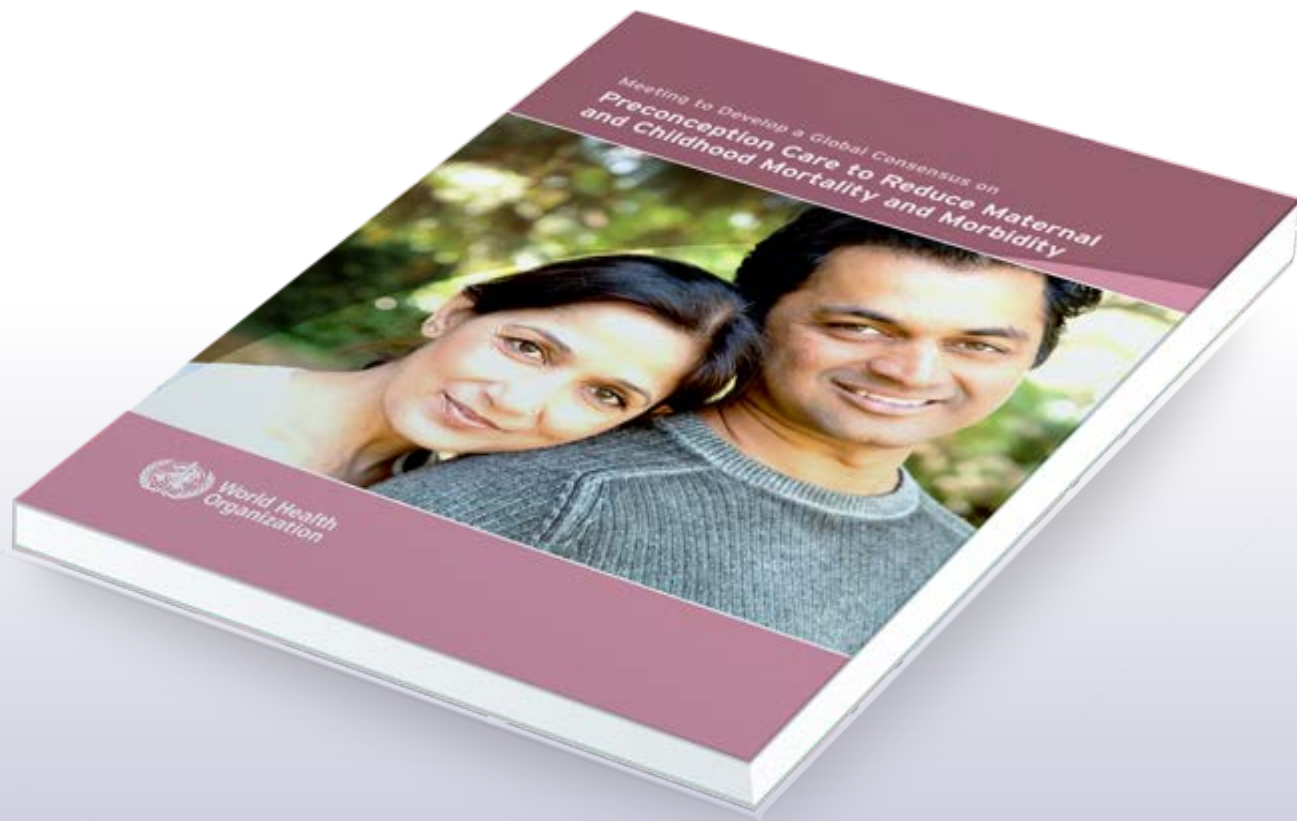
Preconception care has a positive effect on a range of health outcomes:



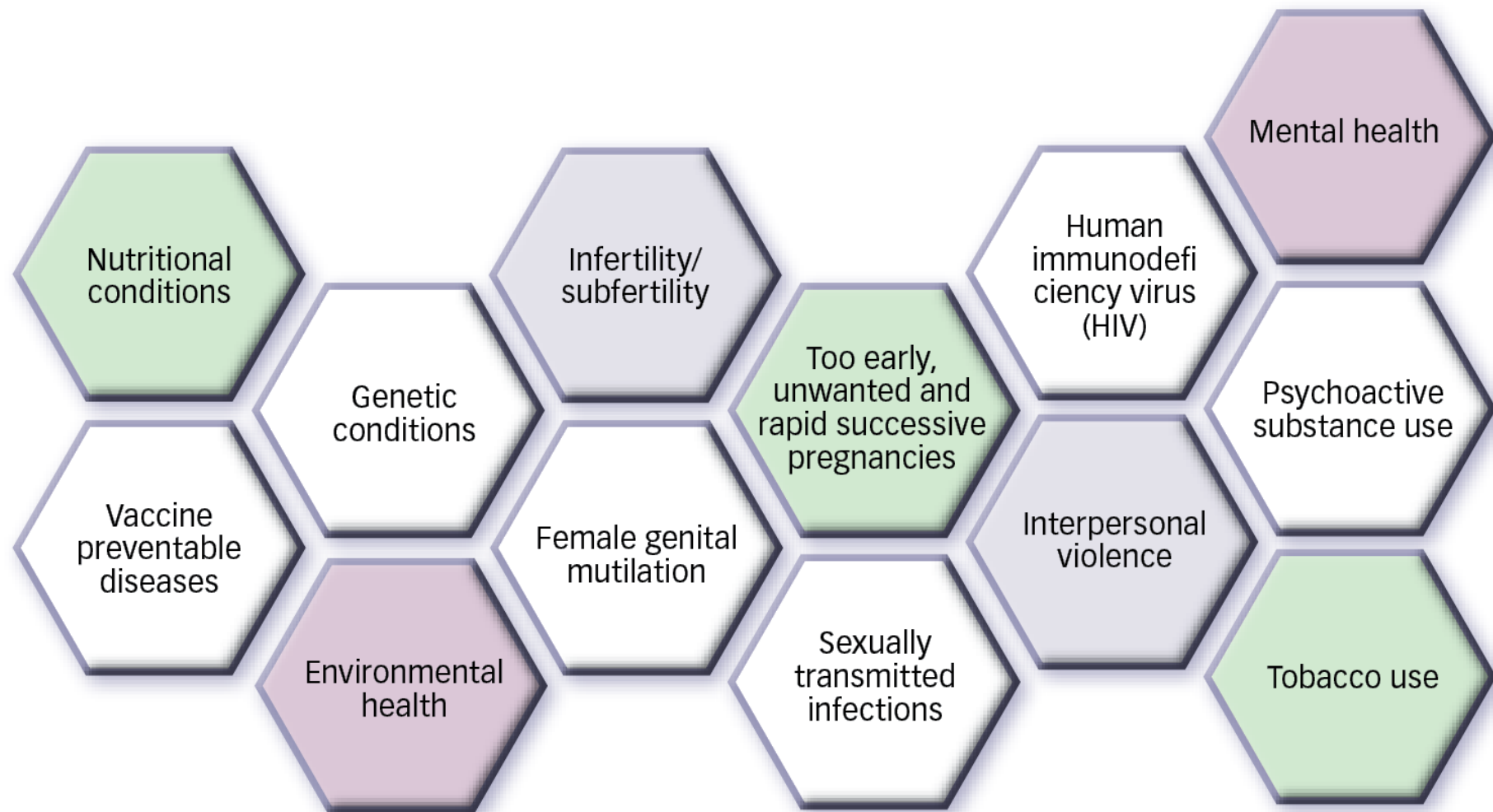
child mortality	maternal mortality
birth defects	low birth weight
preterm birth	macrosomia
neonatal hypoglycemia	mental retardation
goitre	cretinism
hypothyroidism	childhood cancers
type 2 diabetes and cardiovascular disease in later life	congenital and neonatal infections
vertical transmission of HIV/STIs	underweight and stunting
reduced breastfeeding	diarrhoea



WHO has developed a package of preconception care interventions



Areas addressed by the package





Evidence-based interventions:

Selected examples

Areas addressed by the
preconception care
package

Nutritional conditions



Evidence-based interventions

- Screening for anemia
- Supplementing iron and folic acid
- Information, education and counselling
- Monitoring nutritional status
- Supplementing energy- and nutrient-dense food
- Screening for diabetes mellitus
- Management of diabetes mellitus
- Counselling people with diabetes mellitus
- Monitoring blood glucose (also in pregnancy)
- Promoting exercise
- Salt iodization



Evidence-based interventions:

Selected examples

Areas addressed by the
preconception care
package

Genetic conditions



Evidence-based interventions

- Screening for anemia
- Taking a thorough family history
- Family planning
- Genetic counselling
- Carrier screening and testing
- Appropriate treatment
- Providing community-based education
- Community-wide or national screening among populations at high risk
- Population-wide screening



Evidence-based interventions:

Selected examples

Areas addressed by the
preconception care
package

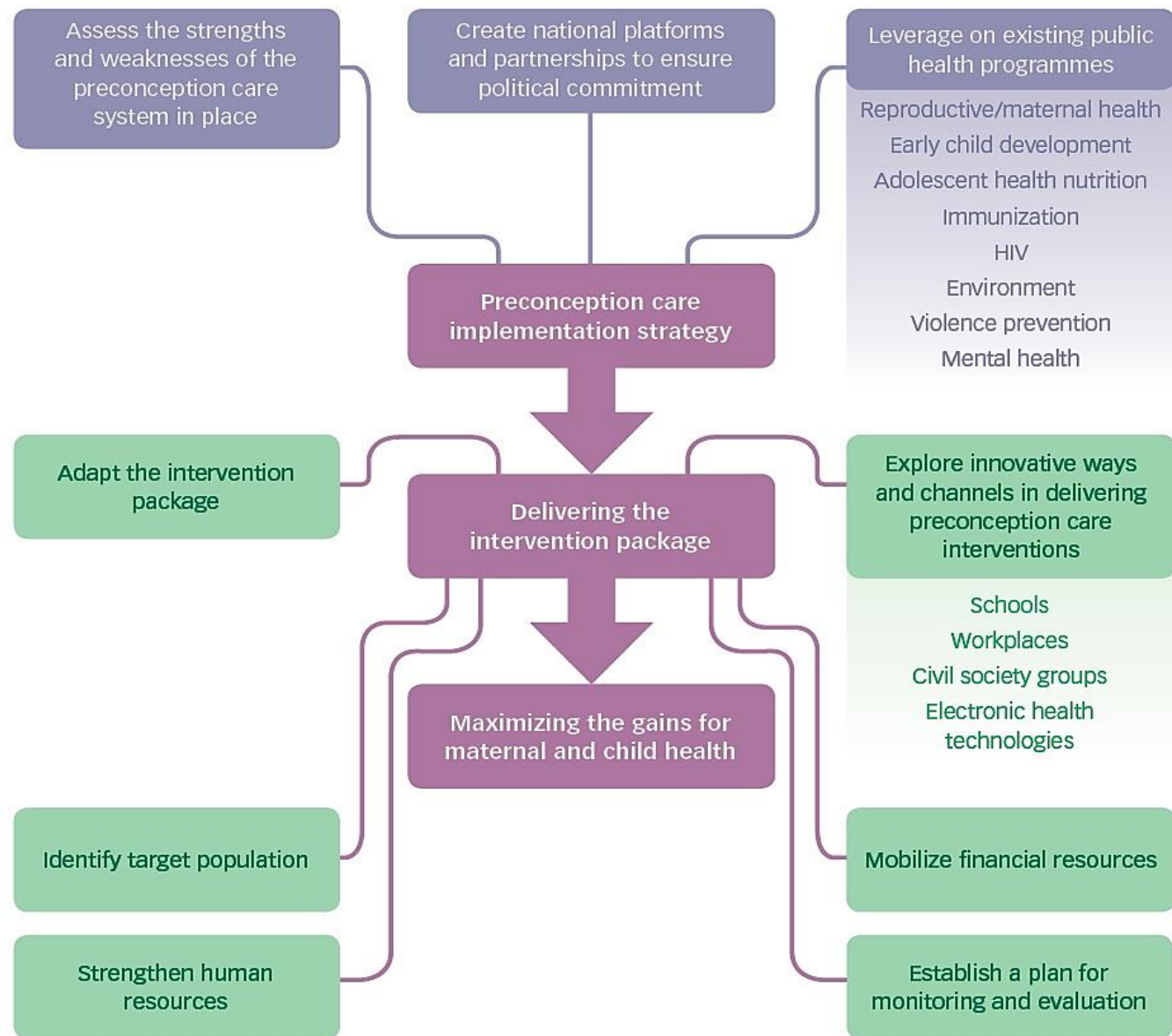
**Too-early, unwanted
and rapid successive
pregnancy**



Evidence-based interventions

- Keeping girls in school
- Influencing cultural norms that support early marriage and coerced sex
- Creating visible, high-level support for pregnancy prevention programmes
- Educating girls and boys about sexuality, reproductive health and contraceptive use
- Building community support for preventing early pregnancy and for contraceptive provision to adolescents
- Enabling adolescents to obtain contraceptive services
- Empowering girls to resist coerced sex
- Engaging men and boys to critically assess norms and practices regarding gender-based violence and coerced sex
- Educating women and couples about the dangers to the baby and mother of short birth intervals
- Providing contraceptives

A Strategy for Country Action



Successful preconception care initiatives



- There is growing experience in implementing preconception care initiatives:
- in high-income countries, such as Italy, the Netherlands and the United States
- in low- and middle-income countries, such as Bangladesh, the Philippines and Sri Lanka





WHO support to countries

Create regional/national platforms and partnerships to advance preconception care interventions.

Introduce professionals in countries to international experience, research, evidence and good practices.

Provide a methodology to analyze and understand the strengths and weaknesses of the preconception care system in place, and opportunities for improvement.

Explore various delivery strategies for preconception care interventions, and their comparative advantages in terms of coverage, feasibility, acceptability and cost.

Adapt the package of preconception care interventions to regional and country priorities, and health systems contexts.

Explore and document innovative ways to deliver preconception care outside the traditional maternal and child health programmes, while recognizing the importance of integrated delivery mechanisms.

Develop a roadmap to make changes over time.

Monitor, evaluate and document progress.

WHO supports regions and countries in implementing a step-by-step processes to improve availability of and access to preconception care interventions



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