



Background

As part of our broader portfolio in sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), EngenderHealth has worked with governments and other partners for almost 30 years to expand access to high-quality comprehensive abortion care (CAC), including information and counseling, induced abortion, and postabortion care (including postabortion family planning). Grounded in health and human-rights frameworks, our work recognizes the tremendous, preventable toll that unsafe abortion takes on women, girls, and other individuals,¹ as well as communities and healthcare systems, and understands that lack of access to safe abortion violates globally agreed rights to health and bodily autonomy, among others. The best antidote to unsafe abortion, from both health and rights perspectives, is to make high-quality CAC² available and accessible to all who need and want it.

EngenderHealth's abortion work began as we served as a founding member of the Postabortion Care (PAC) Consortium in 1993. Since then, our efforts have included adapting our COPE—Client-Oriented, Provider-Efficient Services—model for improving CAC to better serve clients, and we have integrated abortion services into our comprehensive SRHR programs to strengthen health systems and expand coverage and equity. One example of this work is our long-standing partnership with the Government of [Ethiopia](#), through which we have contributed to ensuring the availability, accessibility, acceptability and quality of safe abortion care by supporting comprehensive services, including second-trimester abortions and medical abortions, and working closely with the government on policies, standards, and guidelines for safe, legal abortion, with an emphasis on meeting the needs of young people and other marginalized populations. In addition to Ethiopia, in the past decade, EngenderHealth has worked to expand access to CAC in [Benin](#), [Burkina Faso](#), [Côte d'Ivoire](#), [India](#), Niger, Senegal, [Tanzania](#), and Togo. We have helped advance implementation of laws, policies, and global commitments; strengthened advocacy skills of local women's rights organizers and youth leaders; supported communities in transforming harmful gender norms; helped empower clients to more effectively demand the services they need; and expanded high-quality, gender-equitable abortion services in facilities, communities, and healthcare systems, including in humanitarian settings.

Several global trends and opportunities related to our [mission to implement high-quality, gender-equitable programs that advance SRHR](#) have led EngenderHealth to re-envision and clarify our role in supporting abortion rights and access to CAC globally. This strategy³ builds on our legacy of abortion work, draws on established technical expertise and experience, and leverages our unique organizational strengths. We are confident that our updated strategy will guide us and our partners to achieve our [vision of a gender-equal world where all people achieve their SRHR](#), including the right to safe abortion.

Global Trends and Opportunities

There have been seismic changes in the abortion landscape in the past decade. Four such changes have especially influenced our updated strategy for expanding abortion rights, equity, and access.

¹ EngenderHealth recognizes that not everyone who becomes pregnant identifies as a woman or girl. A pregnant person may be a woman, a girl, a nonbinary person, or transgender man. Tailored approaches are needed to address the needs of different communities and individuals.

² CAC includes all elements of pre-abortion information and counselling, safe induced abortion as well as postabortion care, including postabortion family planning and links to other SRH services.

³ This strategy was launched in July 2023.

Emboldened Opposition

Despite the overwhelming global trend in recent decades toward liberalization of abortion laws, concerted pushback is evident around the world. Opposition to abortion rights intersects with opposition to comprehensive sexuality education, contraceptive access, and similar aspects of women's, LGBTQ+, and other marginalized groups' rights. This escalation in opposition drives us to underscore our rights-based approach to abortion programming, while maintaining an emphasis on the public health imperative of expanding access to abortion. This dual approach remains essential, especially since opposition to rights-based programs is occurring in several countries where we work.

Universal Health Coverage (UHC)

The United Nations enshrined a global commitment to universal health coverage (UHC)—which focuses on equity, quality, and removing financial hardship—in the Sustainable Development Goals in 2015 and in a further high-level political commitment in 2019. UHC reforms are underway in many countries, including more than a dozen that have passed supportive legislation. To date, however, there is wide variation in the degree to which SRHR interventions, such as comprehensive sexuality education and safe abortion, are included in national UHC packages. EngenderHealth recognizes a primary health care approach—which works across the social determinants of health, emphasizes partnerships with communities, and strives to bring services as close to communities as possible—as key to ensuring inclusion of abortion and other SRHR services in UHC health benefit packages and to supporting countries in realizing their UHC goals.

The Global Self-Care Revolution

The global self-care movement, which supports people to manage their healthcare with or without the involvement of a healthcare provider, directly promotes individual agency. Self-care for abortion is a powerful approach to redress inequities that affect women, girls, young people, and other marginalized groups. It helps ensure that everyone has the knowledge and tools—such as pregnancy tests and abortion pills—to make and implement informed health and life choices, increasing privacy while also circumventing stigma and discrimination. EngenderHealth is committed to demonstrating the transformative impact of self-care by working with and through national governments, professional associations, and the private sector to expand access to self-managed medical abortion.

New WHO Guidance

In 2022, the World Health Organization (WHO) released its newest [Abortion Care Guideline](#). The new guideline establishes a clear agenda for the future of abortion rights and care, which EngenderHealth is well-positioned to support. For example, the WHO's comprehensive, client-centered approach for strengthening access to CAC covers three essential domains—law and policy, clinical services, and service delivery—all of which align with EngenderHealth's expertise, experience, and priorities. The guideline recognizes that much work is still needed to incorporate linkages to high-quality abortion care throughout the health system and to uphold human rights and ensure gender equality in all contexts—two areas in which EngenderHealth brings notable strengths. The [WHO's Self-Care Guideline](#), also revised in 2022, similarly supports the use of voluntary self-managed medical abortion in early pregnancy.

Goal and Results

EngenderHealth's abortion strategy responds to the global context, trends, and opportunities and leverages organizational strengths built over decades of experience working in the international SRHR arena. It aligns fully with our organizational strategic framework and theory of change, and falls squarely within our core impact area of [SRHR](#), with links to our impact areas on [maternal and obstetric care](#) and [gender-based violence](#) prevention and response. The strategy also helps us realize our commitment through the [Generation Equality Forum](#) to work consistently and comprehensively on high-quality abortion care, with a focus on expanding abortion access for young people. It also helps us deliver on the commitments we made at [ICPD+25](#) and with [SheDecides](#).

The overarching goal of our strategy for improving abortion access, equity, and rights is that:

All women, particularly young women and people with the least access, live in supportive environments and can obtain high-quality, affordable abortion care, free from discrimination, within or near their community.

Our first programmatic objective is to ensure that **women, especially adolescent girls and young women, have the self-efficacy—the knowledge, skills, and confidence—to exercise their rights to access abortion care when and where they need it.** We will focus on expanding access to and use of self-managed abortion so that people can safely manage unwanted pregnancies on their own terms. This will include supporting comprehensive sexuality education for in- and out-of-school youth and innovative SRHR education campaigns. We will systematically and meaningfully engage youth in the design and implementation of all abortion-related programs, so that interventions reflect and respond to the realities of their lives, enable them to make more informed choices, and support them in accessing abortion care. In addition, with our partners, we will continue to support community dialogues to help shift social norms, reduce stigma, and increase support for abortion rights. This is key to ensuring that women and girls can obtain comprehensive SRHR information and services and have the agency to access safe abortion free from discrimination.

The strategy's second objective is that **laws, policies, and health system guidelines are gender- and youth-transformative and socially inclusive**—that is, that they address the barriers faced by unmarried girls and women, people with disabilities, socially disadvantaged populations, and other marginalized groups—and that they result in respectful, equitable, and **high-quality abortion services that are available and accessible.** Recognizing that nearly every country permits abortion in some circumstances, we commit to partnering with national authorities, health professional associations, and other local actors everywhere we work to ensure that safe abortion is accessible to the full extent of existing laws. We will use a primary health care approach and apply a human rights

OUR THEORY OF CHANGE



and gender-transformative lens to clarify and strengthen health system guidelines, policies, and training curricula, and to expand integrated service delivery. We will work closely with governments and other partners to ensure the inclusion of abortion in national UHC plans and packages, in accordance with WHO guidance. To address the growing challenge of providers refusing to deliver abortion services, we will work with providers to support the process of reflecting upon, challenging, and changing personal biases, prejudices, and stereotypes around abortion. To do this, we will use EngenderHealth’s gender, youth, and social inclusion approach, which is integrated with abortion values clarification for action and transformation and other approaches, to shift attitudes and to build the knowledge and capacities of duty bearers, including health system authorities and healthcare providers. Our work with health systems and in legal and policy arenas will include a focus on expanding access to medical abortion pills and identifying and removing barriers to self-managed abortion. Importantly, we will increase our work at all levels to expand legal, policy, and service indications for abortion, including by continuing to amplify the voices of local youth and feminist champions for abortion rights.



Implementing the Strategy: Applying EngenderHealth’s Strengths, Priorities, and Commitments

To achieve these results, EngenderHealth will draw on and enhance our strengths, including applying proven cross-cutting strategic approaches. **Our gender- and youth-transformative and socially inclusive tools and methodologies; our comprehensive, integrated approach to health systems strengthening; and our innovative partnerships** offer unique value, complementing the expertise of other organizations, initiatives, and programs. In implementing our abortion strategy, we commit to leveraging these strengths and our broader technical expertise for maximum impact; to collaborating effectively with a wider array of partners working at local, regional, and global levels; to sharing our tools and approaches; and to documenting results more fully.

Transformative Approaches

- EngenderHealth’s commitment to human rights informs every aspect of our programs.
 - Our human rights work looks across three dimensions: redressing human rights violations,

addressing vulnerabilities, and promoting human rights. Within the context of abortion, we support clients to demand information and services from government and community leaders and collaborate with lawyers' associations to support and protect laws that support access to CAC.

- **EngenderHealth is a leader in fully integrating transformative approaches that tackle inequitable social norms related to gender, youth, and other aspects of marginalization**, with tools such as our [Gender, Youth, and Social Inclusion Analysis Framework and Toolkit](#). Our approach blends strong clinical expertise and community engagement interventions to address values and practices in families, communities, health systems, and societies that prevent women, girls, and others from accessing SRHR information and care. We use a robust risk assessment framework and a Do No Harm Framework to mitigate any unintentional harm and/or backlash that abortion seekers, providers, and supporters may face.

Health Systems Strengthening

- **EngenderHealth has a long history of working at the intersections of SRHR, maternal and obstetric care, and gender-based violence, as well as strengthening integrated service delivery.** We believe that holistic, integrated services lead to better health for all. EngenderHealth is one of only a few organizations with the expertise and experience to strengthen health systems and integrate abortion services across a range of health areas, such as safe obstetric surgery, including caesarean, obstetric fistula, postabortion care, and second-trimester abortion; contraceptive care, including postabortion and postpartum family planning; and gender-based violence prevention and response programs.
- **EngenderHealth's approach to primary health care has successfully helped governments and other partners to strengthen national health systems in delivering high-quality abortion care at all levels** (including in communities and at primary, secondary, and tertiary care facilities). Consistent with global guidance for Primary Health Care, Universal Health Coverage, the WHO Abortion Care Guideline, and the WHO Self-Care Guideline, we will continue to support governments to reorient their health systems and investments to expand coverage, reduce inequities and bring high-quality non-discriminatory integrated abortion services as close to the community as possible and along the full continuum of care. This entails working across multiple issues that affect service delivery, such as planning, budgeting, policy development and implementation, technical guidance, curriculum development, service organization and management, and human resources, as well as improving quality assurance, training, supply and logistics management, monitoring and evaluation, and use of data for decision-making. We will also leverage and enhance multiple service delivery models to improve abortion services, including promoting access to high-quality self-managed medical abortion in communities by enhancing the capacity of primary care providers and supporting surgical interventions in higher-level facilities.
- **Supporting empowered communities to actively change social norms, remove abortion stigma, and demand services is central to EngenderHealth's mission.** We work across sectors to ensure the availability of accurate information and to address the intersections between abortion and issues such as humanitarian response, education, nutrition, climate justice, and other fields.

Innovative Partnerships

- **EngenderHealth's commitment to locally led development underlies our model of inclusive, meaningful, and trust-based partnerships with national organizations** on safe abortion. We not only believe in the power of partnerships, but we also believe that those partnerships mean more when they are locally led, equitably co-designed, and accountable to the

communities in which we work. With local partners in the lead, we develop relationships that transform power structures and change the discourse in communities and societies about gender parity and the positive role of safe abortion in the lives of individuals, families, and communities. Our approach includes expanding current partnerships with feminist- and youth-led organizations to better reach young people—the largest cohort needing safe abortion services—with medical abortion information and supplies, including for self-care. We commit to collaboratively employing innovative strategies for sharing information, linking young people to medical abortion services, and accompanying these young people through the process, using all service delivery and media channels.

- **EngenderHealth’s commitment to equity means we strive to reach all people, no matter who they are or where they live, with the services that they need and want.** This means we partner with those with the least access to safe abortion care (young people, people living with disabilities, those living in crisis or humanitarian settings, those in rural or urban communities, those pregnant from sexual violence, and those forced into early marriage) to ensure that they are not only included, but meaningfully engaged. As we implement our abortion strategy, we will identify and use equity tools, such as [WHO’s Innova8 approach](#), to help us identify those most in need.
- **Partnering with communities is a cornerstone of EngenderHealth’s programming and an important complement to our expertise in clinical care, primary health care and health systems strengthening.** Our varied community-engagement approaches help ensure government accountability while also strengthening the enabling environment for comprehensive SRHR, including abortion. We commit to continuing to work with community-based organizations to improve acceptance of abortion, and particularly to build support for young women’s access to abortion care including self-managed abortion. We will expand partnerships with community networks and local civil society organizations to support women and girls through the abortion process and to ensure that community perspectives and needs are incorporated into service design and delivery.

The Way Forward

We believe that all people should be supported to live to their full potential. An important component of living to one’s full potential is having the ability to exercise one’s SRHR and to enjoy full physical, mental, social, and emotional health. Abortion is a right and an essential component of healthcare. This right and this care are under attack in many places by well-funded movements that do not uphold human rights. Through our programs and partnerships, EngenderHealth commits to expanding abortion rights, equity, and access, as a key strategy in our work to achieve a gender-equal world.⁴

⁴ EngenderHealth’s work on CAC is supported by donors other than the United States government. We take seriously the requirements of the United States Government and have a robust set of standards and practices in place to ensure compliance. We also take seriously the need to expand access to safe abortion as a core component of SRHR and are grateful to the committed donors who fund this work.