

April 16, 2020
Carol Thompson O'Connell
The Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration
The Department of State
2201 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Acting Assistant Secretary O'Connell,

As members of the Inter-Agency Working Group on Reproductive Health in Crises (IAWG) we are writing to thank the U.S. government for its emergency response and humanitarian assistance to the COVID-19 global pandemic and to inquire about the inclusion of sexual and reproductive health supplies and services.

We appreciate PRM's long-standing leadership in addressing the sexual and reproductive health needs of people around the world through U.S. global health and humanitarian funding and programs. As you know, women and girls, and others who face stigma and discrimination, continue to have sexual and reproductive health needs even as crises unfold. These can include pregnancy, the desire to become pregnant, avoid unwanted pregnancy, avoid sexually transmitted infections, and prevent and respond to gender-based violence. During crises, some of these needs are more acute. We know that gender-based violence increases during crises and that gender-based violence increases the risk of acquiring HIV.

In order to ensure that the sexual and reproductive health needs of women and girls are met throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, we expect the U.S. government to implement the Minimum Initial Service Package (MISP) for reproductive health. The MISP is a coordinated set of priority activities implemented with the goal of reducing mortality, morbidity, and disability among women and girls. The MISP should be seamlessly integrated into the initial response to the pandemic alongside the provision of personal protection equipment, hygiene kits, and public health messaging in order to ensure that reproductive health needs of women and girls are met. Implementing the MISP is not optional: it is an international standard of care that should be implemented at the onset of every emergency.

If we can be of any assistance, we stand ready to help. We urge you toward a strong and effective response to the pandemic that includes the sexual and reproductive health and rights that are so vital to the lives of women and girls.

Sincerely,
Serra Sippel President, Center for Health and Gender Equity (CHANGE)

