



# Kiwanis<sup>®</sup>

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**STATEMENT BY  
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**SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL SECURITY, DEPARTMENT OF STATE, AND  
RELATED PROGRAMS  
COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS  
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**APRIL 2, 2025**

Mr. Chairman, it is an honor to provide testimony to the Committee on behalf of more than 430,000 Kiwanis-family members in nearly 16,000 Kiwanis family clubs, with more than half located within the United States. We appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony in support of the Kiwanis/UNICEF program to eliminate maternal and neonatal tetanus and in support of our work related to iodine deficiency. We are seeking the support of this Committee to recommend \$2,000,000 in the fiscal year 2026 bill for maternal and neonatal tetanus (MNT) and \$3,500,000 for iodine deficiency. This funding would come from the Department of State's accounts related to global health.

I am the retired Executive Director of Kiwanis International and serve as a volunteer under the Executive Director Emeritus role. I have had the privilege of serving Kiwanis members in the United States and in more than 80 countries around the globe.

I have been a member of Kiwanis since 1983, and I was proud to serve as the Executive Director of Kiwanis International and the Kiwanis Children's Fund for more than 14 years, retiring last year. I have seen the success of both of these global health projects in the field, and I have been proud to report back to our members on the charitable work their donations have supported.

And, I have been proud that as an American my government has been an important partner in both of these undertakings. Kiwanis members, along with these two annual government appropriations have invested more than a quarter billion dollars, most of which was from grassroots fundraising by our members, as we have together saved untold hundreds of thousands of lives of mothers and children, and collectively raised the IQs of many demographic groups in undeveloped nations.

Kiwanis remains committed to support both of these global health initiatives and our members are passionate about this part of the work we and they do.

I believe these programs are in the national interest of the United States and consistent with policies related to U. S. humanitarian assistance.

## **IODINE DEFICIENCY**

Iodine deficiency is the world's leading cause of preventable mental impairment. Iodine deficiency has been kept under control through a global movement to iodize edible salt. Funds provided by the United States through a public/private partnership with Kiwanis International, UNICEF, and the Iodine Global Network are preventing brain damage and other adverse outcomes for millions of children.

The U. S. appropriations for Iodine Deficiency Disorders (IDD) funds the joint Kiwanis International/UNICEF program to provide universal salt iodization and investments in measuring, monitoring, reporting, and surveillance of iodine nutrition. This effective program is preventing iodine deficiency and its impact on cognitive development in children.

Kiwanis International has successfully invested in universal salt iodization to virtually eliminate iodine deficiency disorders for two decades. In partnership with UNICEF, and several governments, global access to iodized table salt increased from less than 20% to 88% today. Kiwanis has raised and invested more than \$100 million from its members and clubs for this effort.

We ask for your support for \$3.5 million in fiscal year 2026 to sustain existing iodine deficiency programs and to initiate additional programs to address the needs of the few countries that are still at risk.

Iodine, a micronutrient that naturally occurs in some foods, is an essential element for normal growth and cognitive development in humans. Iodine is not synthesized by the body and is required to be provided through the daily diet in recommended amounts. It is required for proper functioning of the thyroid gland, which in turn regulates many biochemical reactions and the proper skeletal and central nervous system development in fetuses and infants.

While many of the disorders resulting from severe iodine deficiency in dietary intake have virtually disappeared (e.g., goiter, cretinism, stunting, stillbirth), insufficient iodine during pregnancy leads to brain damage that can reduce a child's IQ by up to 8 to 10 points. Even mild-to-moderate iodine deficiency at school age can reduce IQ by 3 to 5 points, and thus, the ability for a child to learn to read.

Thanks to iodized salt, most infants and children of the world have had adequate brain development. Adequate iodine in the diet during pregnancy and until age 5 will greatly improve a child's healthy brain development and readiness to learn as he/she enters primary school grades. Adequate iodine during early life is critical to children's ability to reach their full potential.

The cost of prevention is small – \$.05 a year per individual for a lifetime of protection against iodine deficiency. On average, every dollar spent on salt iodization yields a \$30 return on investment through improved learning, which leads to greater productivity in later life that boosts economies of the nations in which these children live.

## **MATERNAL AND NEONATAL TETANUS**

For over fourteen years, Kiwanis and its members have been working to eliminate the deadly disease of maternal and neonatal tetanus (MNT). Kiwanis launched its global campaign *The Eliminate Project* in 2010 to help save or protect mothers and newborns from MNT. Tetanus is a preventable disease that kills one newborn child every twenty-two minutes.

The maternal and neonatal tetanus programs provide low-cost maternal and neonatal tetanus vaccines for women of childbearing age. These vaccines prevent tetanus and death in newborn children. Maternal and neonatal tetanus (MNT) is a deadly disease, which is easily prevented by a series of three inexpensive vaccine doses to mothers of childbearing age, who, in turn, pass the immunity on to their children.

Participation and funding by the United States are imperative to the success of eliminating MNT. In many developing countries, childbirth is done at home without the support of a healthcare worker and without a clean, sterile blade to cut the umbilical cord. This, and other factors, can lead to tetanus poisoning in the newborn baby, causing severe spasms and an excruciatingly painful death.

It is a terrible disease in which human contact exacerbates the baby's pain. A mother's touch hurts, leaving the baby to writhe in agony for a few days until he or she dies.

MNT results when tetanus spores, which are present in soil everywhere, enter the bloodstream. It is mainly caused by a lack of access to sanitary birthing conditions, unclean instruments used to cut the umbilical cord, and unclean post-partum cord care. MNT is easily prevented by a series of vaccine doses to women of childbearing age, who pass the immunity on to their children.

Women who are properly vaccinated with the tetanus vaccine will have immunity through most of their childbearing years and their babies are protected through the first two months of life. We believe these mothers deserve to give birth to healthy babies, and their babies deserve to achieve their full human potential.

In partnership with UNICEF, Kiwanis committed to and has raised more than 120 million dollars to immunize women in countries where MNT is still a major health threat. More than 6,000 Kiwanis-family members and clubs in the United States alone have contributed to the fundraising campaign. We are now tackling the hardest leg of a difficult journey.

Since 2000, MNT has been eliminated in 49 of the 59 at risk countries. Between 1999 and 2024, more than 169 million women in some of the world's most remote places were vaccinated against tetanus, saving thousands of newborns from death due to tetanus every year.

## **.SUPPORT FOR PARTNERS**

We have a highly effective partnership with UNICEF and urge you to support UNICEF in its request for a U.S. fiscal year 2026 contribution. We also support United States funding for maternal and child health.

## **CONCLUSION**

Mr. Chairman, I ask you to join us in our efforts working to eliminate MNT. Help us ensure that no baby suffers this excruciating seven-day death ever again by recommending \$2,000,000 within global health accounts for the elimination of maternal and neonatal tetanus. This funding will help target the last countries to be certified for the elimination of MNT and protect the lives of hundreds of thousands of children.

Funds provided through the U. S. public/private partnership with Kiwanis International, UNICEF, and the Iodine Global Network, are preventing brain damage and other adverse outcomes for millions of children. Funding at the level of \$3,500,000 will provide continued funding to keep global attention to this intervention and to address the needs of the few countries that are still at risk of iodine deficiency disorders.

Thank you for your consideration.