

IMPLANT ACCESS PROGRAM: EXPANDING FAMILY PLANNING OPTIONS FOR WOMEN

The global family planning community is working to ensure that more women around the world have access to contraceptive options and family planning services and information. As part of this global effort, a group of organizations collaborated to make contraceptive implants—a previously less accessible family planning option—more available to women in the world's poorest countries.

Since the launch of the Implant Access Program (IAP) in 2013, tremendous progress has been made toward expanding contraceptive access and options and strengthening global family planning systems overall.

THE FAMILY PLANNING LANDSCAPE

Globally, 214 million women and girls who don't want to get pregnant have an unmet need for modern contraception. At the 2012 London Summit on Family Planning, global leaders set an ambitious goal to ensure 120 million additional women and girls in the poorest countries would have access to and use modern contraception by 2020. We've made remarkable progress: 30 million more women are using contraception today than in 2012, but we are at risk of defaulting on our promise if we don't accelerate the progress. Achieving the FP2020 goal is a critical milestone on the path to achieving universal access to contraceptives by 2030. We can deliver faster on our promise if we commit to providing women with more contraceptive options, so they can voluntarily choose a method that best meet their needs.

There is high demand for long-acting reversible contraceptives (LARCs), including implants, in developing countries, where access to health clinics is often limited and stock-outs are common. Overall demand for LARCs is increasing significantly, particularly when they are consistently available and supported by strong counseling and clinical services.¹

THE IMPLANTS

Jadelle® is a two-rod, progestin-only implant that provides effective contraception for women for up to five years.

Implanon NXT® is a single-rod, progestin-only implant that provides effective contraception for up to three years and comes in a pre-loaded sterile applicator. **Implanon NXT®** offers a next-generation applicator designed for easy and rapid, single-handed insertion.

Proper insertion—subcutaneously in the upper arm—and removal of contraceptive implants requires trained healthcare providers.



Patience Kebirungi (right) stands with trainee provider Suzan (left) after implant removal
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THE IMPLANT ACCESS PROGRAM

A group of public and private organizations collaborated to make Bayer Pharma's Jadelle® and MSD's Implanon® and Implanon NXT® available to women in the world's poorest countries at price reductions of approximately 50% through 2018.

Other organizations involved in the agreement include: the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation; the Clinton Health Access Initiative (CHAI); the governments of Norway, Sweden, the United Kingdom and the United States; and the Children's Investment Fund Foundation (CIFF), with support from the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). The IAP supports the recommendations of the UN Commission on Life-Saving Commodities to increase the availability of quality, life-saving commodities for women's and children's health.

The price reductions were just the first step. The IAP organizations also are collaborating closely with a number of other international organizations to train health workers on counseling and proper implant insertion and removal; reduce supply chain disruptions; increase service delivery quality and availability; and raise awareness about implants at the community level. Donors and governments are working together to ensure adequate funding is available in all FP2020 countries to take these critical next steps.

¹For additional information on the demand for LARCs see: Three Successful Sub-Saharan Africa Family Planning Programs: Lessons for Meeting the MDGs (Ethiopia, Malawi, Rwanda), USAID/Africa Bureau, 2012.

KEY PROGRAM ACHIEVEMENTS

- **Access:** In 2016, more than **8.7 million** implants were distributed in the world's poorest countries. During the first four years of the IAP (2013 - 2016), more than **34 million implants** have been distributed - an 84% increase from 2012.
- **Cost Savings:** Implant price reductions led to more than **US\$85 million** in savings for donors and developing country governments in 2016, and **US\$329 million** since the inception of the program in 2013.
- **Sustained Access Pricing:** In 2016, Merck and Bayer announced plans to maintain access pricing for contraceptive implants in the world's poorest countries. Both companies committed to extend their respective access pricing commitments for an **additional five years**, through 2023.
- **Forecasting and Supply Planning:** Applying new tools and processes to improve coordination between partners, the coordinated supply planning (CSP) group has helped suppliers to better meet country demand for implants. In 2016, the CSP group mobilized resources through UNFPA, USAID, and DFID for procurement of an additional **900,000 implants** for countries in need, providing over 3 million couple years of protection (CYPs) and potentially averting over one million unintended pregnancies. The systems developed by the CSP group are now also being used to support forecasting and supply planning for injectables.
- **Training & Service Delivery:** IAP partners continue to monitor and address issues that arise from the increased availability of implants, including perceived discrepancies between implant supply and uptake, concern regarding reported ART/implant interaction and institutionalization of mechanisms for continued monitoring of quality and coverage.
- **Implant Removals Taskforce:** IAP partners have actively engaged with the FP community to discuss the challenges related to ensuring access to quality implant removal services. The group has outlined a consensus on effective practices for expansion as well as priorities for research and learning. This topic remains a global priority, and the task force work will continue throughout 2017 to ensure that this critical component of quality is actively monitored and strengthened, culminating in development and dissemination of an "implant removals toolkit" in late 2017/early 2018.

DEVELOPMENTS IN THE IMPLANTS FIELD

- **Improving the quality of generic implants:** In November 2016, generic implant manufacturer Shanghai Dahua Pharmaceutical Co., Ltd., (Dahua) received a favorable rating of 1 from the WHO Expert Review Panel for its product, Levoplant, which was subsequently approved by UNFPA for purchase by its country programs. Levoplant was prequalified by WHO on June 30, 2017.

CASE STUDY

Jhpiego: Avoiding Unplanned Pregnancies in Uganda

It is outreach day in Kabale Health Center IV in southwestern Uganda, and Suzan, a midwife, is ready to learn more about how to safely and easily remove contraceptive implants as well as manage side effects associated with implant use. The training is part of her continuous professional education through a new learning approach that emphasizes hands-on clinical skills building in facility-based settings. The approach was pioneered by Jhpiego as part of the "Best Practices in Implant Removal" project. Referred to as Low Dose High Frequency (LDHF), the training method offers intense, but short learning sessions that allow health workers to increase their skills without leaving their health facilities for long periods of time. Suzan will then be able to build on her new skills in side effect management and implant removal procedures with actual clients.

Patience Kebirungi, 32 years old, is one of the women in Kabale District who is excited about being able to access implant removal services at a health facility near her home and at no cost. Patience received an implant a year and two months ago and now wishes to conceive again. She says, "Together with my husband, we agreed to get an implant insertion."

The implant has become increasingly popular in Uganda. From 2011 to 2016, implant use increased from 10.4 percent to 18.1 percent among married women who are using contraception. From Patience's perspective, "I have enjoyed using the implant because it makes me feel protected at all times. It is also comforting to know that I can have it removed easily at no cost and at a facility that is close to my home... The health workers here have been supporting me to manage side effects. I am glad that it is the same providers that will remove the implant."