

Bangladesh

Quality sexual and reproductive health care reaching millions—with great potential for scale



Dulali, a ready-made garment worker, is receiving quality family planning services from Pathfinder-supported programs. Photo: Ridwanul Mosrur

For more than 60 years, Pathfinder has partnered with communities and the government of Bangladesh to expand access to contraception, strengthening public health services to better serve women and girls. Today, our partnership with the government increases access to quality sexual and reproductive health care through universal health coverage.

Our support in Bangladesh includes the mentorship, supportive supervision, and training of health care providers; integration of gender-transformative approaches; readying health facilities to provide quality services; and digital health solutions. Our work is underpinned by strong engagement with communities to ensure all people can access quality health care services.

We work in over half of the country—33 districts, home to 14.7 million couples of reproductive age and 18 million adolescents. The Bangladesh government has adopted many of our tools and approaches, showing great potential for national scale.

In Bangladesh, we reach the most marginalized and underserved communities, including those living in urban slums, Rohingya refugee camps, and regions devastated by climate change-induced natural disasters including floods.

Areas of Expertise

Empowering adolescents and youth

Over the last year, Pathfinder reached 7.5 million young people with sexual and reproductive health information through digital health initiatives.

Adolescent and youth sexual and reproductive health services at health facilities

Pathfinder supports health facilities to offer quality, gender-responsive sexual and reproductive health care to young people through updates to health guidelines and curricula and working with health facilities on action plans meant to improve services for young people. Pathfinder has developed a counseling manual on adolescents' sexual and reproductive health that ensures health providers offer non-judgmental services to adolescents and youth.

Young people in their communities

For the many young people who will never visit a health facility on their own, we work with community health workers to organize structured courtyard meetings, reaching young people in their communities with sexual and reproductive health information, counseling, and referrals. We reinforce community outreach through school-based programs and educating gatekeepers (influential people in the lives of young people). Through our partnerships with local nongovernmental organizations, we ensure our outreach is inclusive of marginalized and hard-to-reach adolescents, such as those who are transgender; live in urban slums, rural, and water-logged areas; or do not attend school.

Digital innovations

Pathfinder supports the government's digital platforms, including *Kishore Batayan – Konnect*, by incorporating sexual and reproductive health information for adolescents. Through this digital platform, young people can learn about and engage in discussions about sexual and reproductive health. We partner with the government to drive traffic to the Directorate General of Family Planning's Information, Education, and Motivation Facebook page, which includes a chance for young people to directly engage with providers who answer their questions and provide referrals for services.



A newlywed is checking the information booklet on family planning services provided by Pathfinder at the day of the wedding. Photo: Mishal Paul

“I want to continue my study, but I am a newlywed. I got a box through my wedding program where I found information about reproductive wellbeing and getting access to a temporary [family planning] method. I met my service provider on my wedding day and, according to her suggestion, I decided to take a temporary method to delay my pregnancy until I am 20.”

-Joya Rani
Young client, Gouripur, Mymensingh

Strengthening health systems

In 2022, 9,164 health providers received Pathfinder-supported competency-based trainings.

Developing skilled providers through training, mentorship and supportive supervision

The mentorship and supportive supervision app, manuals, and action plan handbook, rolled out by Pathfinder's USAID-funded Shukhi Jibon project, have significantly improved health facility readiness to provide quality services. Outcomes include: health providers using better communication skills, practicing respect and empathy with clients, maintaining privacy and confidentiality, using checklists and job aids to provide services, and having better problem-solving skills. In addition, Shukhi Jibon has worked closely with government training institutes to standardize health worker trainings, improve equity in access to trainings, encourage data-driven decision making, and institutionalize competency-based training nationally.

Expanding contraceptive access and choice

More than 6,000 health providers were trained to counsel pregnant women on postpartum family planning.

Long-acting, reversible and permanent methods

Pathfinder's Shukhi Jibon project supported the national family planning program to increase access to long-acting reversible and permanent contraceptive methods among the contraceptive choices being offered. This has included refresher trainings on provision of these methods, including how to manage side effects.

Community-based postpartum family planning

In Bangladesh, almost half of all deliveries occur at home. Pathfinder's Shukhi Jibon project has supported frontline health workers to regularly visit pregnant women in their homes, where they register their pregnancies, offer counseling on postpartum family planning during antenatal care and postnatal care visits, and encourage them to deliver at health facilities.



Hasna Begum receives maternal health care at a clinic in Sylhet. Photo: Hafiz Shishir

Supporting gender-responsive care

More than 15,000 service providers have been trained on gender-integrated family planning services.

The Shukhi Jibon project has introduced gender-integrated family planning services in the national public health system, developed related guidelines and manuals now used in government training programs, and is supporting nearly 1,000 health facilities to adopt the approach. At 16 health facilities, the project is piloting the integration of referrals to gender-based violence services into family planning and sexual and reproductive health services. Evidence will be used for national advocacy.

Making communities and health systems resilient to climate change

Through our Takeda-supported program in Bangladesh and Pakistan, we intend to reach 700,000 people over the next three years with solutions for better health and climate change resilience.

Pathfinder is working in areas of Bangladesh most prone to flooding and other natural disasters, some of which are caused by climate change. We work simultaneously to make the health system more resilient to shocks and stressors, while working with communities, and particularly women and girls, on solutions to better health and climate change resilience.

Current Projects

USAID's Accelerating Universal Access to Family Planning Project (Shukhi Jibon)

Funder: USAID
Amount: US \$40 Million
Dates: 2018-2023

Shukhi Jibon is implemented in all 268 upazilas of 32 districts in four divisions of Bangladesh (Dhaka, Mymensingh, Sylhet, and Chattogram), covering about half of the country. In partnership with the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, this project provides adaptive, needs-driven technical assistance and systems strengthening at national, division, district, and upazila levels. Shukhi Jibon has reached 13.5 million couples and adolescents.

Advancing the Leadership of Women and Girls towards better Health and Climate Change Resilience

Funder: Takeda Pharmaceutical Company Limited
Amount: US \$3 Million
Dates: 2021-2026

Communities most vulnerable to the climate crisis often face the highest barriers to sexual and reproductive health and rights. In humanitarian situations, they grow higher still, with even the most basic care upended. Pathfinder elevates women and girls as changemakers in their communities, engaging them to lead resilient, local, and rights-based solutions to climate adaptation.



Anita Rani Chandra, postpartum family planning client, in Moulavibazar, Bangladesh. Photo: Ridwanul Mosrur

Women-Led Climate Resilience Pilot Program

Funder: Pathfinder International's pooled fund
Amount: US \$175K
Dates: 2023

Pathfinder is implementing this one-year innovation project in Gaibandha, in response to a published study report assessing climate change vulnerability of sexual and reproductive health service systems and communities. The project is working on approaches to meet the sexual and reproductive health needs of these communities.

Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights within the Humanitarian-Development Nexus in Cox's Bazar

Funder: David and Lucile Packard Foundation
Amount: US \$750K
Dates: 2019-2023

Pathfinder works with local partners to improve the sexual and reproductive health and rights of women and girls in Teknaf and Ukhiya upazilas of Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh. The project serves more than 589,000 people in host communities and 745,000 refugees in Rohingya refugee camps. Through the project, we provide integrated health care and gender-based violence referral services.

Pathfinder International is driven by the conviction that all people, regardless of where they live, have the right to decide whether and when to have children, to exist free from fear and stigma, and to lead the lives they choose. As a global health organization with locally led, community-driven programs, we support women to make their own reproductive health decisions. We work with local partners to advance contraceptive services, comprehensive abortion care, and young people's sexual and reproductive rights in communities around the world—including those affected by poverty, conflict, climate change, and natural disasters. Taken together, our programs enable millions of people to choose their own paths forward.

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