

USAID Transform: Primary Health Care Activity Removing Barriers to Contraceptive Care

Before receiving support from USAID Transform: Primary Health Care, patients at the Haik Health Center had to travel long distances and wait in long lines to have contraceptive implants removed. “Now, through back-up support for family planning services, we can remove and insert contraception implants. The fact that mothers are getting the services they need at nearby Health Posts (HPs) gives me great joy,” said Zewditu Mekonnen, a health worker at Haik Health Center who regularly provides back-up support to 014-Wahillo HP.

Providing women of reproductive age with a variety of family planning (FP) methods is crucial to preventing unintended pregnancies and improving maternal and child health. Meaning, short and long-acting reversible contraceptives (LARC) must be provided regularly by trained health providers at the community level. This had not been the case in Ethiopia until recently. Since 2003, health extension workers (HEWs) in Ethiopia have been promoting disease prevention and providing selected curative health services at health posts (HP)— the lowest unit within the primary health care system. However, for far too long, FP methods were dominated by short-acting reversible contraception, leaving women with limited methods of choice.

All this changed when, the USAID Transform: Primary Health Care supported the Ethiopian Ministry of Health to train HEWs to insert Implanon—a contraceptive implant used to prevent pregnancy. However, training HEWs did not fully solve the problem because clients with an Implanon insertion had to be referred to health centers (HCs) for the removal service. To tackle this challenge, USAID Transform: Primary Health Care, in collaboration with public health facilities introduced “back-up support” for family planning services from HCs to HPs.



Zewditu Mekonnen, Family planning service provider at Haik HC. Photo: USAID Transform Primary Health Care Activity

Back-up support allows health workers from HCs to regularly visit HPs to provide services that are not offered at HPs. Some of these services include the removal of Implanon, as well as other contraceptive implants like, Jadelle.

The Haik Health Center provides back-up support to seven HPs located in the Amhara region. Of these HPs, 014-Wahillo HP is located six kilometers (3 miles) away. At 014-Wahillo HP, HEWs counsel women and their partners about modern FP methods. The counseling is done during house visits for promotive and preventive health activities and as part of Ethiopia’s national immunization program. The HEWs schedule appointments with clients who are interested in LARC services and clients who need removal services are prepped for back-up support from the HC. Through this arrangement, clients who would not have ordinarily been able to access removal services at the HP level are now able to. The back-up support system has strengthened the linkage between the Haik HC and 014-Wahillo HP and facilitates the transfer of much-needed family planning skills from HCs to HPs.