

**URGENT SUPPORT NEEDED:****62,000 women will give birth in flood-affected Pakistan over the next month**

The Australian Reproductive Health Alliance (ARHA) is calling for the Australian government and Australian aid organisations to ensure that the health and safety of women and girls are prioritised in the humanitarian response in flood-affected Pakistan.

ARHA applauds the efforts to provide food, water, shelter and health care in flood-affected Pakistan, but also notes the need for the provision of life-saving sexual and reproductive health services.

Mary Mertin-Ryan, ARHA's CEO today stressed, "With over 2,000 women giving birth each day in areas affected by the floods, many women face a heightened risk of losing their lives. We must ensure that women have access to emergency obstetric care and clean delivery kits to help prevent them dying in childbirth." Over the next month, approximately 62,000 women are expected to give birth.\*

In Pakistan, 85% of the population displaced by the floods are women and children, who are at increased risk of gender-based violence, including sexual assault. Cultural norms make it difficult for many women to receive health care services from men, and many of the affected areas struggle with a dearth of female health workers.

Large numbers of displaced people are without access to contraceptives, antiretroviral, medicine to reduce HIV transmission after rape, and other priority sexual and reproductive health services. This situation can exacerbate the spread of sexually transmissible infections, including HIV. Women are particularly vulnerable, not just to violence and sexual assault, but also to infection as a consequence.

"A sensitive and comprehensive response to the situation is required: it must take into account the cultural sensitivities of the region; the vulnerability of girls and women (and especially pregnant women); and the increased danger of the spread of sexually transmissible infections including HIV.

ARHA applauds the role of AusAID in recent humanitarian crises in our region, where it has worked to ensure that women and girls have access to the life-saving reproductive health services of the Minimal Initial Services Package (MISP), including in Pakistan. ARHA calls for the health of women and girls to be included in all Australian assistance to Pakistan.

\* This figure is calculated on the basis that, in any displaced population, approximately 4% of the total population is pregnant at any given time. An estimated one ninth of the pregnant population gives birth each month. It is based on UN figures that 14 million people are affected by the floods.

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*ARHA's mission is to promote public support for enhanced reproductive and sexual health in Australia and internationally, and to promote the advancement of the status of women and girls [www.arha.org.au](http://www.arha.org.au)*