

May 13, 2021

The WHO Expert Committee on the Selection and Use of Essential Medicines

Re: To express support of the application to the WHO Essential Medicines List for Multiple Micronutrient Supplementation for pregnant women

Dear Expert Committee,

This is to present the compliment of Friends of the Children of Haiti (FOTCOH) and to express our support in favor of adding *Multiple Micronutrient Supplements (MMS) – Antenatal Supplement* to the WHO Model List of Essential Medicines (EML).

Friends of the Children of Haiti (FOTCOH) is a nongovernmental organization that has operated a medical clinic in rural Haiti for over 30 years. FOTCOH provides no-cost, year-round medical services as well as community education and hygiene programs at our clinic in Cyvadier, Haiti, a region where medical access is greatly lacking. Patients travel from rural areas surrounding the region to receive treatment on an ongoing basis. Our patients would otherwise have no access to free healthcare. FOTCOH's Women's Health Initiative program provides prenatal care, breastfeeding education, cloth diapers, and menstrual hygiene kits. Vitamin Angels and FOTCOH have partnered for over 9 years to provide over 200,000 Vitamin Angel MMS annually to women seeking prenatal care at the clinic. The Women's Health Initiative program would not be possible without the support of MMS donated by Vitamin Angels. FOTCOH strongly supports the inclusion of MMS in the WHO Essential Medicines List.

Haiti's infant mortality rate is 59 per 1,000 live births and approximately 22% of children under the age of 5 experience stunting¹. UNICEF estimates that there are 55,000 cases of acute malnutrition, including 18,000 severe cases, in children under the age of five². Malnourishment among women of reproductive age remains prevalent: 49% of women ages 15-49 have anemia³. Micronutrient deficiency during pregnancy remains a major public health problem in Haiti. Evidence from clinical trials has concluded that antenatal MMS is superior to iron and folic acid (IFA) supplementation in improving birth outcomes, and has equivalent benefits for preventing maternal anaemia.

Haiti's National Guiding Health Plan has laid the foundation for combating micronutrient deficiencies in its Strategy 2.3.6. This action plan outlines micronutrient supplementation for pregnant women and nutritional surveillance for pregnant women. The plan laid out activities used to follow through on this strategy including the strengthening of routine micronutrient

¹ Institut Haïtien de l'Enfance (IHE) et ICF. 2018. *Enquête Mortalité, Morbidité et Utilisation des Services (EMMUS-VI 2016-2017)* Pétiön-Ville, Haïti, et Rockville, Maryland, USA : IHE et ICF

² UNICEF. Haiti Factsheets. <https://www.unicef.org/haiti/media/626/file/Fact-Sheet-f%C3%A9vrier-2019.pdf> Updated February 2019. Accessed January 18, 2020

³ USAID. Haiti: Nutrition Profile. <https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1864/Haiti-Nutrition-Profile-Mar2018-508.pdf> Updated February 2018. Accessed January 18, 2020

supplementation services. Technical nutrition committees and sectoral groups exist in ten departments of Haiti and are regularly working with local authorities and organizations to ensure better integration of the Multiple Micronutrient Supplementation into communities.

Adding the MMS on the Essential Medical List will be a key step towards supporting the efforts of the Haitian government and the civil society to scale MMS in Haiti. The inclusion of MMS on the EML will particularly encourage the integration of MMS in our nutrition programming and will facilitate the importing process of the product on the national territory.

FOTCOH strongly urges that Multiple Micronutrient Supplementation be accepted as an item on the WHO EML.

Sincerely,

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