New Report Tracks Global Progress Toward Universal Coverage for Reproductive, Maternal, Newborn, Child and Adolescent Health and Nutrition

Countdown to 2030 highlights major challenges to reaching SDG targets, including universal coverage of essential health services to women, children and adolescents

CAPE TOWN – Today, leading experts in global women's, children's and adolescents' health launched *Countdown to 2030's first* comprehensive report that tracks progress toward universal coverage for reproductive, maternal, newborn, child, and adolescent health and nutrition globally. Building on the strengths of the previous *Countdown to 2015*, it marks the first large-scale analysis of highest-burden countries amid the context of the ambitious 2030 agenda for sustainable development and Every Woman Every Child Global Strategy for Women's, Children's and Adolescents' Health (2016-2030). The report and other materials including country profiles are now available at www.countdown2030.org.

"Our findings demonstrate that for most countries, the past decade was largely one of tremendous progress," said lead co-author Jennifer Requejo of Johns Hopkins University. "However, many countries are still far from achieving universal coverage, and data suggest that even among the women and children who access health services, many continue to receive low-quality care."

Synthesizing data from a wide range of sources on the current situation and trends in 81 low- to middle-income priority countries that account for 95 percent of all maternal deaths and 90 percent of deaths among children under age five, the report details a leap forward in expanding coverage and reducing in-country inequities for many essential health services, spurring rapid declines in both under-five and neonatal mortality, among other health indicators.

"Notably, some countries stood out as equity champions despite economic barriers and significant gaps in a few key health services like childbirth services," said lead co-author Cesar Victora of the Federal University of Pelotas. "Malawi achieved impressively high coverage across all wealth quintiles and geographies through a commitment to progressive policies, the application of reliable and timely data to inform practices, and strong health system investments."

Countdown co-chair Zulfiqar Bhutta, from the Aga Khan University, Karachi, Pakistan and the SickKids Centre for Global Child Health, Toronto, Canada said, "Although we've seen considerable drops in undernutrition in the past decade—an issue which accounts for a large percentage of deaths in children under five and contributes to poor childhood development—we still have a long way to go. Nearly half of all

Countdown priority countries with recent data had more than 30 percent prevalence of stunted growth in children under 5 years of age."

Countdown to 2030 also details the challenges of poor data, weak country health systems, poor governance and political instability, limiting the ability to reach all women, children and adolescents with timely and quality health services.

"We cannot understate the significant link between conflict and poor health outcomes in women and children," said lead co-author Ties Boerma of the University of Manitoba. "Nearly 40 percent of the *Countdown* priority countries—from Afghanistan to Nigeria—experienced at least one conflict between 2011 and 2016, some nationwide, some local. And countries like Syria characterize how conflict can lead to the rapid deterioration of even well-functioning public health systems, resulting in the disruption of health facilities and exodus of trained health professionals."

Countdown Co-chair Stefan Peterson of UNICEF stated, "When women give birth in facilities, newborns have a better chance at survival. Facility-based births also offer the opportunity to systematize and strengthen data and analysis on maternal and neonatal health and assess the quality of care delivered."

Viewed together, the *Countdown to 2030*'s findings demonstrate that in order to achieve the ambitious targets outlined in the Sustainable Development Goals, it will be critical to ensure that no woman, child or adolescent is left behind and receives quality essential services. This requires strong health and health-related programs that are guided by regular collection, analysis and use of data to implement evidence-based practices that expand coverage and quality of services and drive drown inequities.