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### What Does it Cost to Provide Free Maternal and Child Health Services in Primary Health Centres? A Case Study of Imo State, Southeast Nigeria

*Quel Est le Coût de la Fourniture Gratuite de Services de Santé Maternelle et Infantile dans les Centres de Santé Primaires ? Une Étude de Cas de l'État d'Imo, Sud-Est du Nigeria*

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#### ABSTRACT

**BACKGROUND:** This study estimated the cost of providing free maternal and child health (MCH) services at the primary health centre (PHC) level in southeast Nigeria. The costs of providing an essential benefit package of maternal and child health (MCH) services are unknown. Such information is required for optimal resource allocation decisions and for replicating similar programmes in different settings.

**METHODS:** The full and unit costs of providing a thin benefit package of MCH services in all the 418 PHC centers in Imo State, southeast Nigeria were computed using an ingredient and activity costing approach from a provider perspective. Data on costs were collected both retrospectively and cross-sectionally. Data on service utilisation by mothers and children under five years were collected from the PHC attendance registers.

**RESULTS:** The total cost was \$27,710,009.00, whilst the unit costs for delivering combined MCH services in 418 PHCs were \$37.2. However, for just child health services, the unit cost was \$13.7 per child, whilst the unit cost of providing just maternal health services was \$42.7 per pregnant woman. Personnel costs contributed 84.6% of the total cost.

**CONCLUSION:** The findings will guide the design and scale-up of a similar programme towards the achievement of universal health coverage of MCH services. **WAJM 2024; 41 (9): 959-965**

**KEYWORDS:** Cost, free, Maternal health, Child health, Primary health centre, Nigeria

#### RÉSUMÉ

**CONTEXTE:** Cette étude a estimé le coût de la fourniture gratuite de services de santé maternelle et infantile (SMI) au niveau des centres de santé primaires (CSP) dans le sud-est du Nigeria. Les coûts de la mise en œuvre d'un paquet essentiel de services SMI restent inconnus. De telles informations sont essentielles pour des décisions optimales d'allocation des ressources et pour reproduire des programmes similaires dans différents contextes.

**MÉTHODES:** Les coûts totaux et unitaires de la fourniture d'un paquet restreint de services SMI dans les 418 CSP de l'État d'Imo, au sud-est du Nigeria, ont été calculés en utilisant une approche de calcul par ingrédients et activités, selon une perspective du prestataire. Les données sur les coûts ont été recueillies de manière rétrospective et transversale. Les données sur l'utilisation des services par les mères et les enfants de moins de cinq ans ont été extraites des registres de fréquentation des CSP.

**RÉSULTATS:** Le coût total s'est élevé à 27 710 009 USD, tandis que le coût unitaire pour la prestation combinée des services SMI dans les 418 CSP était de 37,2 USD. Cependant, le coût unitaire pour les seuls services de santé infantile était de 13,7 USD par enfant, tandis que celui des services de santé maternelle s'élevait à 42,7 USD par femme enceinte. Les coûts du personnel représentaient 84,6 % du coût total.

**CONCLUSION:** Les résultats de cette étude fourniront des orientations pour la conception et l'extension de programmes similaires, contribuant ainsi à la réalisation de la couverture santé universelle des services SMI. **WAJM 2024; 41 (9): 959-965**

**MOTS-CLÉS:** Coût, Gratuit, Santé maternelle, Santé infantile, Centre de santé primaire, Nigeria

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**Abbreviations - ANC:** Antenatal care; **DHIS 2:** Data for Health Information Software 2; **FMCH:** Free maternal and child health; **FP:** Family planning; **HIV:** Human immunodeficiency virus; **MCH:** Maternal and child health; **OICs:** Officers-in-charge; **PHC:** Primary health centre; **PNC:** Post natal care; **SURE-P:** Subsidy reinvestment program