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Liberia's Health Crisis Worsens as U.S. Aid Disappears

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In the small village of Sarworlor in central Liberia, Roseline Phay's days have grown more difficult than ever. A mother of two and a farmer, she once relied on her local clinic for basic care and contraceptives. But when she walked miles along dusty roads to get birth control, she was met only with empty shelves.

Her story is shared by many Liberians after the United States suspended much of its foreign aid, delivered through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). For decades, that funding kept Liberia's fragile health system functioning, paying for everything

from malaria treatment to maternal health care. Now, communities are facing shortages of medicine, fuel for ambulances, and salaries for health workers.

“I’m suffering,” Phay said quietly, holding her young daughter, Pauline, who was recently weaned off breastfeeding to make way for her unborn sibling. Without nutrition support, Pauline became so malnourished that she nearly died. Phay knows she will have to keep farming through her pregnancy or her family will go hungry.

Between 2014 and 2023, Liberia received more than \$500 million a year in aid. This year’s expected funding was slashed by nearly \$300 million when U.S. support stopped flowing. The impact is clear in Bong County, where clinic cabinets once stocked with contraceptives, malaria tablets, and medical gloves now stand bare.

“It was beyond a shock,” said Moses Banyan, head of the local CB Dunbar Hospital. He worries about the spread of mpox, a disease creeping over the border from Sierra Leone, as health workers struggle without supplies.

The timing felt like a betrayal to many Liberians. The country’s history is tied to the United States, which helped found Liberia as a home for freed slaves in the 1800s. Its flag and political institutions were modeled on America’s. For decades, Liberians viewed the U.S. as a dependable “big brother.”

But the sudden loss of aid has forced officials to look elsewhere. China, already building roads and investing in mining, has begun filling some gaps, opening a cardiology wing in the capital’s main hospital.

In Sarworlor, health worker Alice Togbah still wears her faded USAID vest even though she hasn’t been paid in months. She has no malaria medication left and few options for mothers like Phay.

“I don’t want my daughter to suffer like me,” Phay said. “If you have the medicine, please help us.”

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