Status of child health

Mortality
- The Constitution says children in South Africa have the right to basic nutrition, shelter, basic health care services and social services.
- Despite a range of laws, policies and programmes to realise children’s rights to health, there has been little improvement in child and infant mortality.
- 81% of child deaths in South Africa in 2007 were children under five years.
- South Africa is one of only 12 countries currently not on track to meet the Millennium Development Goal to reduce under-five mortality.
- According to modelled estimates, the under-five mortality ratio has fallen from 66 in 1990 to 73 deaths per 1,000 live births in 2005.
- Leading causes of under-five mortality are HIV/AIDS, neonatal causes and childhood infections, including diarrhoea and lower respiratory infections. Baby and trauma are the leading cause of death amongst older children.
- 60% of children under-five who die in hospital in 2005–2007 were underweight. Malnutrition is a key contributing factor.

Nutrition
- ”Sharing, the strong predictor of childhood mortality in under-five-vorabies, affected 18% of 1–3-year-old children in 2005.
- Only 26% of children (6–11 months) were exclusively breastfed in 2008 – one of the lowest rates of breastfeeding in the world.
- In 2005, 9% of children 1–9 years old were underweight in South Africa.
- Children need sufficient nutritious food to grow and develop their full potential. Access to food and adequate nutrition is affected by socio-economic status.
- In May 2010, more than 9.7 million children aged under five years,
- In 2008, 64% of children lived in the poorest 40% of households with an income of less than R50 per person per month.
- There are significant inequalities between provinces: Only the Western Cape and Gauteng have less than 50% of children living in poverty.
- Procedural figures mask further inequalities. In the Western Cape, in 2008, there were over 41,000 informal dwellings in Khayelitsha, and only 360 in Belville.
- Poverty compromises children’s health and nutrition, impairs immunity and increases their exposure to disease and injury.
- Social services, in the form of the Child Support Grant, has played a key role in alleviating child poverty, and is associated with improved health outcomes.
- In May 2010, more than 57.9 million children aged 0–16 years received the Child Support Grant. The grant will be available to all eligible children under-16 by 2012.

Social determinants

Poverty and inequality
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Living conditions
- Poverty impacts on children’s living conditions and access to services.
- Lack of access to safe water and sanitation leads to the spread of diarrhoea, helminths, intestinal worms and other waterborne diseases.
- Over 7 million children (38%) rely on inadequate sanitation (open toilets, latrines, buckets or open wells).
- In 2008, more than a third of children (36%) did not have access to piped drinking water on site.
- Over 5 million children (30%) live in overcrowded conditions, which increase exposure to infectious diseases such as tuberculosis.
- One in 10 children (12%) lives in informal housing. Young children in these conditions are particularly vulnerable to burns and paraffin poisoning.

Health services

Access to clinics
- Public health services are free for children under six, pregnant women, people with disabilities and social grant beneficiaries.
- Primary health care is free for all.
- Health transport costs and long distances to health facilities may lead to healthcare delays in accessing treatment.
- Over 7 million children (41%) have to travel more than 30 minutes to reach the nearest clinic.
- There are large inequities between the private and public health service. The public sector provides care to an estimated 60% of children, yet only one in six has an appointment to HIV/GAIDS.
- China starvation also compromises the quality of health services. 35% of health professionals in the public sector were vacant in 2008.

Child care
- Most children in South Africa have access to basic health services.
- Immunisation is an essential component of child care to protect against preventable diseases.
- The data was used to inform policy programmes and future research. Fourth survey of child healthcare in South Africa.
- Decision-making to save the lives of mothers, babies, and children in South Africa.
- A fourth survey of child healthcare in South Africa.
- Many surveys are available on the website for more information on child health and survival.
- Children living far from the nearest clinic, 2008.
- Immunisation coverage of children under one year, by district, 2008.