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The international community has compelling humanitarian, political, security, and economic reasons to become involved in fragile states. Health is an entry point for engagement because people living in fragile states are disproportionately affected by major health problems such as high maternal and child mortality, AIDS, and malaria, and improvements in health services help strengthen civil society and restore legitimacy to governments. This paper presents the characteristics of fragile states and describes various models of engagement with them, while asserting that this support should always combine short-term relief with longer-term development.

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