



# LETTER TO LMIC HEALTH MINISTERS

## ACCESSING INTERNATIONAL FINANCING FOR MEDICAL OXYGEN NEEDS

25 May 2021

The **Every Breath Counts Coalition** is pleased to share with **Ministers of Health from low- and middle-income countries (LMICs)** more details on the new sources of international financing now available to strengthen their health systems to provide enough medical oxygen to treat COVID-19 and other patients during the pandemic and beyond.

Oxygen is the single most important medicine to treat COVID-19 patients and is the intervention that will save the most lives until countries are fully able to protect their populations with COVID-19 vaccines.

On 25 February 2021, in response to LMIC calls for oxygen support, the **Access to COVID-19 Tools Accelerator (ACT-A)** announced an Oxygen Emergency Response as part of the therapeutics pillar, co-led by Unitaid and Wellcome. An **ACT-A Oxygen Emergency Taskforce** was established with representation from the World Health Organization (WHO), UNICEF, the Global Fund, the World Bank, UNOPS, Save the Children, the Every Breath Counts Coalition, the Clinton Health Access Initiative (CHAI), and PATH to mobilize an effective multilateral response.

To date, ACT-A Emergency Oxygen Taskforce members have announced the following financial support for oxygen:

### 1. GLOBAL FUND

On 12 March 2021 the Global Fund announced additional financing to help eligible countries provide personal protective equipment (PPE), diagnostics, and/or therapeutics including oxygen to reduce COVID-19 infections and deaths through the **COVID-19 Response Mechanism (C19RM)**. This funding is provided by the US (\$US3.5 billion) and German (\$US200 million) governments.

Global Fund-eligible LMICs can now apply for "Fast-track Funding Requests" on a rolling basis and for "Full Funding Requests" during three submission windows - 31 May, 15 June, and 30 June 2021.

The Global Fund is encouraging countries to include oxygen in their C19RM funding requests. The Global Fund has already announced fast-track oxygen financing to **India** (\$US75 million), and **The Gambia**. Oxygen requests should be based on country needs assessments consistent with WHO guidelines performed by governments and their implementation partners and should also be packaged with other COVID-19 treatment needs, particularly corticosteroids and low-dose anticoagulants.

Applications must be endorsed by the Global Fund Country Coordinating Mechanism (CCMs), and funding requests related to national COVID-19 control, the national COVID-19 response coordinating body's endorsement is required.

**Health Ministries should work with the Global Fund CCMs to ensure quality oxygen proposals are submitted by the deadlines [here](#).**

### 2. WORLD BANK

On 20 April 2021, the World Bank announced flexible financing to eligible countries for vaccine rollout and to strengthen health systems, including by providing oxygen as part of the COVID-19 Fast-Track Facility or the **COVID-19 Strategic Preparedness and Response Program (SPRP)**. LMICs can use the financing for health system strengthening activities, such as

medical supplies (including oxygen), personal protective equipment, vaccine cold-chains, training health workers, data and information systems and communications and outreach campaigns.

Many countries have used World Bank COVID-19 funding to strengthen their oxygen systems, including [Tajikistan](#), [Rwanda](#), [Tanzania](#), and more.

**Health Ministries should work with World Bank country offices to ensure that quality oxygen proposals are prioritized and submitted to the World Bank's COVID-19 Strategic Preparedness and Response Program (SPRP). A full list of World Bank-funded COVID-19 projects can be found [here](#).**

### 3) UNITAID AND WELLCOME

Unitaid and Wellcome are co-conveners of the ACT-A Emergency Oxygen Taskforce. Through the taskforce, they are leading the engagement and coordination with global health partners working to accelerate access to oxygen, as well as funders and industry. A key component of this work is connecting technical partners, multilateral agencies, and Ministries of Health to develop and submit oxygen funding requests to mechanisms including the Global Fund and World Bank. The taskforce is also working to address some of the key bottlenecks that continue to disrupt access to oxygen, by engaging in market-shaping activities.

On 3 May 2021, with \$US20 million from Unitaid and Wellcome, international NGOs CHAI and PATH announced a new program to **procure and supply oxygen equipment** prioritized by the Ministries of Health in Liberia, Malawi, Nigeria, Uganda, and Zambia. The planned procurement will enable the delivery of oxygen cylinders and accessories for the transportation, storage, and dispensation of medical oxygen. The procurement plans also include purchasing other respiratory care equipment such as pulse oximeters and equipment for facility refurbishments such as piping, which is needed to deliver oxygen to the bedside.

Additionally, on 15 May, the Ethiopian Ministry of Health announced a tender to procure, install, and commission PSA plants, power generators and medical oxygen cylinders in three prioritized hospitals – Gambella Regional Referral Hospital, Mizan Tepi Teaching Hospital and Nekemte Specialized Hospital – with the support of CHAI and funding from Unitaid. More procurement with other LMICs will be forthcoming with remaining Unitaid support. Further, Wellcome will provide \$US10 million to strengthen the technical support LMIC ministries can call on to procure, install, and maintain the new oxygen equipment.

**Health Ministries should work with NGO oxygen experts to assess country needs for oxygen and develop procurement plans to meet the technological requirements and critically, the human capital - health care workers and biomedical and clinical engineers - needed to install, operate, and maintain the new equipment. More details on the CHAI/PATH five African country tender can be found [here](#) and the Ethiopian Ministry of Health PSA plant tender [here](#).**

### 4) UNICEF

On 5 May 2021, UNICEF announced that the Government of Canada had invested \$US182 million to the newly-launched **Access to COVID-19 Tools Accelerator Supplies Financing Facility** (ACT-A SFF) earmarked specifically for the procurement and delivery of COVID-19 therapeutics such as oxygen therapy-related supplies and dexamethasone for LMICs. This contribution has already provided 1,450 oxygen concentrators to India as part of UNICEF's response to the country's ongoing COVID-19 outbreak. The ACT-A SFF is a pooled fund that draws on UNICEF's global procurement to purchase COVID-19 tests, treatments, and vaccines.

**Health Ministries should engage local UNICEF country offices to explore how the SFF could support your national plans to meet your emergency oxygen needs. More details on the ACT-A SFF can be found [here](#).**

### 5) WHO

The WHO continues to provide oxygen support to LMICs, publish guidance, mobilize technical expertise, and educate the public about the critical role of oxygen during the pandemic. On 12 May 2021 the WHO launched **Oxygen Access Scale Up** a dedicated webpage where all the WHO oxygen materials are collected. The WHO states that medical oxygen is lifesaving and an essential medicine that can be used at all levels of the health system and is crucial for the treatment of COVID-19 and

other life-threatening conditions such as severe pneumonia, severe malaria, sepsis (from bacteria and viruses), trauma and complications of birth or pregnancy and essential for safe surgical, emergency and critical care services. The WHO underscores that unlike other medicines, oxygen doesn't have a substitute.

**Health Ministries should ensure that national oxygen policies, plans, and programs are consistent with WHO guidelines and guidance and to work with national and regional WHO offices to strengthen national oxygen policies and programs. More details [here](#).**

## **6) EVERY BREATH COUNTS**

The Every Breath Counts Coalition has called on G7 governments to provide an immediate, initial investment of \$US200 million to the ACT-A oxygen emergency response so that it can respond quickly (within days) to LMIC requests to alleviate imminent medical oxygen shortages and related deaths. Emergency funding with the flexibility to rapidly procure and deploy both oxygen solutions and the trained healthcare workers and biomedical engineers to use, maintain, and refurbish the equipment is urgently needed. There are more than 40 countries now at risk of oxygen shortages that may require this type of fast support (see table below).

**Health Ministries should communicate directly with G7 governments so that they have clear sight on country oxygen needs and can mobilize quickly to prevent the shortages that have caused so many deaths in India and now Nepal.**

Without adequate supplies of medical oxygen, COVID-19 case fatality rates will remain high as currently oxygen is one of the only treatments available for COVID-19 in LMICs. To date, not one of the more than 40 LMICs currently experiencing surging needs for oxygen has managed to protect more than 20% of their population with one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine.

The [COVID-19 Oxygen Needs Tracker](#), which enables LMICs to track their daily need for medical oxygen to treat COVID-19 patients, is reporting a daily need of 23 million cubic meters, (3.3 million large cylinders), to meet the oxygen needs of COVID-19 patients every day across all LMICs. The annual cost of meeting this oxygen need is estimated at \$US5 billion.

**Health Ministers must act now with urgency to prevent further deaths from lack of access to medical oxygen by utilizing the financial support available from ACT-A Oxygen Emergency Taskforce members.**

Investments made in medical oxygen now will not only reduce COVID-19 deaths but will continue to save lives beyond the pandemic, especially among newborns, children, and adults with both communicable and non-communicable diseases. Medical oxygen is truly an investment that will strengthen all health systems and prepare countries for the future respiratory pandemics, which are expected to occur.

---

Contact: **Leith Greenslade**, Coordinator, Every Breath Counts Coalition, [leith@justactions.org](mailto:leith@justactions.org), +1 917 969 6084

### **Every Breath Counts Coalition**

Every Breath Counts is a coalition of 50 United Nations and multilateral health and development agencies, companies, foundations, non-government organizations (NGOs), and academic institutions supporting low- and middle-income countries to reduce deaths from pneumonia, including from COVID-19.

### **Access to COVID-19 Tools Accelerator (ACT-A)**

ACT-A is a global collaboration to accelerate the development, production, and equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines, and treatments drawing on the experience of the leading global health organizations tackling the world's toughest health challenges. Its members share a commitment to ensure all people have access to all the tools needed to defeat COVID-19 and to work with unprecedented levels of partnership to achieve it.



LMIC Oxygen Hotspots	COVID-19 Oxygen Need (cubic meters per day)	COVID-19 Vaccine (% one dose)
India	13,636,074	10.81%
Brazil	2,917,374	18.4%
Argentina	1,201,831	19.11%
Colombia	724,560	9.75%
Iran	588,639	2.36%
Turkey	532,274	18.88%
Russia	392,200	10.5%
Nepal	381,981	7.25%
Philippines	266,734	2.87%
Peru	247,824	6.44%
Malaysia	224,226	4.81%
Ukraine	206,484	2.24%
Iraq	177,507	1.13%
Thailand	155,125	2.72%
Pakistan	137,314	1.73%
Sri Lanka	123,645	6.66%
South Africa	120,207	1.08%
Costa Rica	108,528	14.17%
Paraguay	106,119	2.9%
Bolivia	96,587	9.07%
Ecuador	63,401	7.37%
Cuba	54,804	6.53%
Egypt	53,182	1.11%
Kazakhstan	51,841	10.49%
Venezuela	51,480	1.11%
Georgia	50,637	2.64%
Honduras	41,267	1.38%
Guatemala	39,844	1.94%
Ethiopia	21,702	1.31%
Cambodia	16,769	13.48%
Kenya	15,751	1.77%
Kyrgyzstan	13,056	0.57
Uzbekistan	12,922	3.36%
Afghanistan	12,539	1.21%
Angola	12,068	1.92%
Cabo Verde	9,844	3.84%
Papua New Guinea	8,792	0.13%
Timor-Leste	7,541	3.63%
Viet Nam	6,338	1.01%
Madagascar	6,167	0.05%
Suriname	5,949	10.72%
Guyana	5,798	19.16%
Syria	2,357	0.01%

LMICs with high (> 2,000 cubic meters per day) and rising oxygen needs and low (<20%) coverage with one dose of COVID-19 vaccine as per COVID-19 Oxygen Needs Tracker and Our World in Data Vaccination, 22 May 2021.