



# LETTER TO LMIC HEALTH MINISTERS

## ACCESSING INTERNATIONAL FINANCING FOR MEDICAL OXYGEN NEEDS

Updated 12 August 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.<sup>1</sup>

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 governments of the US (\$US3.5 billion), Germany (\$US165 million), and the Netherlands (\$US60 million).

Global Fund-eligible LMICs can now apply for "Fast-track Funding Requests" on a rolling basis and for "Full Funding Requests" by 17 September 2021 [here](#).

The Global Fund is encouraging countries to include oxygen in their C19RM funding requests. As of 10 August 2021, the Global Fund had approved a total of \$US300 million in oxygen and other treatment support to 48 countries. However, many countries experiencing or at risk of oxygen shortages have not yet applied to the Global Fund including Iran, Russia, Malaysia, Iraq, South Africa, Colombia, Cuba, Morocco, Kazakhstan, Myanmar, Pakistan, Guatemala, Libya, Botswana, Mozambique, Honduras, Algeria, Fiji, Venezuela, Lebanon, Uzbekistan, Ecuador, Eswatini, CAR, Mauritania, DRC, LaoPDR, El Salvador, Jamaica, Montenegro Guinea, Côte d'Ivoire, Lesotho, and Tajikistan [here](#).

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.

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<sup>1</sup> The Access to Medicine Foundation joined the ACT-A Oxygen Emergency Taskforce in April 2021.

Global Fund support can also be used to repair broken oxygen equipment. On 5 August 2021 the Nigerian Government's National Agency for the Control of AIDs (NACA) announced a tender for the repair of broken oxygen plants with financial support from the Global Fund's C19RM [here](#).

**Health Ministries, especially in the oxygen crisis countries that have not yet applied for financing, 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 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. 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 nine LMICs. 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. Unitaid's and Wellcome's catalytic funding will also expand technical cooperation in 48 LMICs to conduct needs assessments, enable surge planning, and develop national oxygen plans.

On 15 May 2021, 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. More details on the CHAI/PATH five African country tender can be found [here](#) and the Ethiopian Ministry of Health PSA plant tender [here](#).

**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 bio-medical and clinical engineers - needed to install, operate, and maintain the new equipment.**

## 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 contri-

bution 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.

On 4 July 2021 UNICEF also announced oxygen support to Uganda with \$US708,000 from the UK Government [here](#) and also issued a Request for Proposals for oxygen generation plant repair and biomedical engineering technical services in multiple LMICs with submissions due 24 August 2021 [here](#).

**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 millions of dollars worth of oxygen supplies to LMICs through the WHO Emergency Programme's [COVID-19 Supply Portal](#) and financed by the [WHO Solidarity Response Fund](#), 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 leaders [here](#) and G20 governments [here](#) to provide an immediate, initial investment of \$US400 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 liquid oxygen solutions and the trained healthcare workers and biomedical engineers to use, maintain, and refurbish oxygen equipment is urgently needed.

The Coalition has produced several tools to increase awareness about oxygen needs in LMICs during the pandemic including the LMIC Oxygen Crisis Risk List [here](#). There are more than 60 countries now at risk of oxygen shortages that may require both Global Fund and emergency support. Many of these countries also have large numbers of broken oxygen equipment (plants and concentrators) as described on the Every Breath Counts Fix List [here](#). The Coalition also released a statement - [The Safety of Oxygen for Medical Use](#) - to clarify that the oxygen generated by PSA/VSA plants (between 90 and 96%), liquid (above 99%), and oxygen concentrators (between 82 and 96%) is all safe for medical use.

**Health Ministries should communicate directly with G7 and G20 donor 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 across LMICs in Latin America, Asia, Eastern Europe, the Middle East, and Africa.**

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 60-plus LMICs currently experiencing surging needs for oxygen has managed to fully vaccinate more than 40% of their populations with COVID-19 vaccines.

The [COVID-19 Oxygen Needs Tracker](#), which enables LMICs to track their need for medical oxygen to treat COVID-19 patients, is reporting a daily need of 18 million cubic meters, (2.6 million large cylinders), to meet the oxygen needs of COVID-19 patients across all LMICs. The annual cost of meeting this oxygen need is estimated at \$US3.6 billion.

**Health Ministers must act now 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.

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**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.*