



STATEMENT

6 December 2021

This Statement is being released for the USAID-hosted COVID-19 Development Ministerial to mobilize donor and partner action around key Global COVID-19 Summit priorities - particularly vaccine delivery and uptake and access to life-saving oxygen - and reinvigorate donor coordination for the global pandemic response.

CALLING ON G20 COUNTRIES TO CONTRIBUTE TO THE MULTILATERAL OXYGEN EMERGENCY RESPONSE

The Every Breath Counts Coalition is calling on G20 governments to each contribute an initial \$US50 million so that the **ACT-Accelerator (ACT-A) Oxygen Emergency Taskforce** can continue to help low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) prevent further medical oxygen shortages in 2022.

Lack of access to medical oxygen and resulting deaths have been a constant and tragic feature of the COVID-19 pandemic. Since the Summer of 2020, many countries in Latin America, Asia, the Middle East, Africa, and Eastern Europe have experienced oxygen shortages.

We do not know how many of the reported 5.2 million COVID-19 deaths could have been prevented if there had been enough oxygen in LMIC hospitals. But it is no coincidence that some of the highest COVID-19 death spikes have been reported in countries where hospitals ran out at critical periods, including Peru, Brazil, and India.

In Peru, the nation with the highest COVID-19 death rate in the world, the lack of oxygen has been described as "**the main driver**" of deaths.

Since its establishment in February 2021, the ACT-A Oxygen Emergency Taskforce - the international, multilateral effort helping LMICs avert oxygen shortages that is co-chaired by Unitaid and the Wellcome Trust - has provided around \$US600 million worth of oxygen supplies to more than 75 countries.

Most of this has been delivered through the Global Fund and financed by the US and European governments. The World Bank, WHO, UNICEF, and Unitaid have also contributed significantly.

But this funding has now been exhausted and the taskforce needs \$US1.4 billion to continue its work through 2022, as outlined in the just released **ACT-A Strategic Plan and Budget** for 2022.

Many LMICs continue to struggle to provide oxygen to treat COVID-19 patients. Data from the **COVID-19 Oxygen Needs Tracker** reveals 38 LMICs at risk of oxygen shortages. The emergence of the new variant, Omicron, has already increased South Africa's oxygen needs fourfold in one week to 208,000 cubic meters per day.

The critical need for more oxygen support to “save lives now” was highlighted by the US President at the **Global COVID-19 Summit** on 22 September 2021, where the USAID Administrator, **Samantha Power**, said:

“the only way to sustainably address the oxygen crisis is to strengthen the local oxygen supply chain in partner countries. As a first step, the US plans to provide \$US50 million to significantly increase access to medical oxygen in partner countries around the world. But because this won’t be enough, we are working to build a coalition not just with governments, but also with foundations, NGOs, and private sector partners, to leverage our investment and coordinate global investment in oxygen access on a much broader scale. This kind of all hands on deck approach - with all of these actors contributing - is what will be needed on all fronts to save lives.”

We appeal to G20 governments to match the US oxygen investment, and each contribute an initial \$US50 million to strengthen the ACT-A oxygen emergency response.

Specifically, we call on the QUAD governments of Japan, India, and Australia to each match the US oxygen investment to protect the Asia-Pacific region from further oxygen shortages. Almost every country in the region has experienced surging oxygen needs during the pandemic, most recently Viet Nam, LaoPDR, and Papua New Guinea.

Canada, Mexico, Brazil, and Argentina should join forces to support Latin America where oxygen shortages continue to be reported, especially in Peru, Colombia, Bolivia, Ecuador, Haiti, and the Dominican Republic. The UK, France, and China are well placed to support Sub-Saharan Africa, where oxygen needs are surging again in many countries, including South Africa, Zimbabwe, Sudan, Madagascar, Eritrea, Chad, Mali, and Burkina Faso.

Saudi Arabia and Turkey should act together to prevent oxygen shortages in the Middle East where the Egyptian, Jordanian, and Lebanese health system are currently stretched to breaking point. And the European Union and Italy are well-placed to support eastern Europe, including Ukraine, Georgia, Bulgaria, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Moldova, and Armenia. All of these countries are on the **Every Breath Counts Oxygen Crisis Risk List**.

G20 nations are well-positioned to strengthen the multilateral oxygen response in these vulnerable regions by financing the ACT-A.

The ACT-A Oxygen Emergency Taskforce has negotiated MOUs with the major providers of liquid oxygen and has established relationships with PSA plant and mobile oxygen concentrator manufacturers to ensure supply. Financial mechanisms are in place to enable fast transactions to procure and transport urgently needed oxygen to where it is needed. Taskforce members also support a network of non-profit agencies with oxygen expertise and trusted relationships with LMIC health ministries and governments.

We do not know what lies ahead or when this pandemic will end. Or even when we may face another. What we do know is that even with effective vaccines, COVID-19 deaths can remain high when vital treatments like oxygen are not available.

We urge you to invest in oxygen via the ACT-A to help the worst affected LMICs reduce the death toll from the pandemic.

Every Breath Counts is a coalition of 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.