



STATEMENT

Ten steps to increase oxygen access, save lives now, and build better health systems

Response to the 2nd Global COVID-19 Summit

16 May 2022

“We don't have any pulse oximeters and we don't have any source of medical oxygen in our hospital. We still have a serious shortage of doctors and we don't have any bioengineer(s). There is only one who covers the district based 90km away. We need support from you to help our service to patients.”

This message arrived last week from an anguished doctor in a hospital in a rural area of southern Africa - a region hit hard by COVID-19 but also by many other infectious diseases and threats to health.

His voice was not among the impressive array of government, civil society, and industry leaders who spoke during the **2nd Global COVID Summit** on 12 May 2022. Just seven leaders even mentioned the word oxygen.¹

The consistent failure by the majority of global leaders to prioritize the most basic treatment for the millions of people suffering with COVID-19 in countries where hospitals do not even have a pulse oximeter or a source of medical oxygen comes at a cost.

It is measured in lives lost. This is now estimated at 15 million since the start of the pandemic and still growing by 10,000 each week. 40% of new COVID-19 deaths are in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) where oxygen remains the most essential of medicines to treat severe COVID-19 but is in chronically short supply.

The Summit was an opportunity to rally the finances to close the wide gaps in oxygen access and slow the constant death march once and for all.

Although most leaders acknowledged the critical role of the **ACT-Accelerator** as the global engine of the pandemic response, only one mentioned that just 3% of the ACT-Accelerator

¹President Joe Biden of the United States, Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern of New Zealand, Deputy Prime Minister Dominic Raab of the United Kingdom, International Development Minister Anne Beathe Tvinneim of Norway, Development Minister Svenja Schulze of Germany, Peter Sands of the Global Fund, and Dr Bill Rodriguez of FIND.

therapeutics pillar budget had been funded, and that \$US1 billion was still needed to help countries avert further oxygen shortages.²

Nobody wants to see a return to the oxygen crises of recent years – with patients lying in the parking lots of hospitals, on the backseats of cars or in their beds at home, waiting for loved ones to return with oxygen.

But how to mobilize the significant resources needed to close oxygen access gaps?

Although just three of the 92 **Summit Commitments** specifically mention oxygen, there are many that announced new investments to improve access to COVID-19 treatments and strengthen health systems.

If this group of commitment-makers ensured that a proportion of their investments were allocated to closing medical oxygen gaps, it would be possible to mobilize the \$US1 billion the ACT-Accelerator needs to help vulnerable countries avert further oxygen shortages and strengthen their health systems.

If the following governments and private philanthropies joined forces \$US1 billion could be mobilized to increase oxygen access, save lives now, and build better health systems.

Accordingly, Every Breath Counts calls on:

1. **United States** to secure \$US400 million for oxygen support, including \$US300 million to enable **The Global Fund** to deliver on its new objective to strengthen LMIC health systems to prepare and respond to future pandemics and \$US100 million to **USAID** as outlined in **recent testimony** to the US Congress.
2. **European Commission** to direct \$US200 million of the new funds announced for the ACT-Accelerator diagnostic, therapeutic, and health systems pillars to the **ACT-A Oxygen Emergency Taskforce**;
3. **World Bank** to dedicate \$US100 million for oxygen support as part of the new **Global Health Security Financial Intermediary Fund**;
4. **Germany** to ensure that \$US50 million of the \$US200 million announced for the ACT-Accelerator diagnostic and therapeutics pillars is invested via **the ACT-A Oxygen Emergency Taskforce**;
5. **Canada** to deliver on its promise of supporting the health of women, children, and adolescents by investing \$US50 million of the new \$US732 million announced to members of the **ACT-A Oxygen Emergency Taskforce** with mandates to support women and children's health;

² International Development Minister Anne Tvinnereim of Norway.

6. **Australia** to allocate \$US50 million of the new \$AUD375 million Health Security Initiative for the Indo-Pacific Region to **the ACT-A Oxygen Emergency Taskforce** to strengthen medical oxygen supply in the Asia-Pacific region;
7. **Spain** to set aside \$US20 million from the 100 million Euro announced for COVID-19 development projects administered by the Spanish Agency for International Development for medical oxygen support in Latin America;
8. **South Korea** to contribute \$US20 million of the new \$US300 million they announced for the ACT-Accelerator to the **ACT-A Oxygen Emergency Taskforce**;
9. **New Zealand** to allocate \$US2 million to oxygen support as part of the new \$US8 million they announced to **The Global Fund** for COVID-19 diagnostics and treatment support and the \$US2 million to **UNICEF** for medical equipment in Viet Nam and the Philippines; and
10. **Private philanthropies and corporations** including the **Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Rotary International, Wellcome Trust** and more to contribute \$US100 million to support the work of members of the **ACT-A Oxygen Emergency Taskforce**.

To deliver the next phase of international COVID-19 support to end the pandemic, and prepare health systems for the next, Every Breath Counts welcomes the call from Senegal President and Chair of the African Union, Macky Sall, for an *“inclusive new world order for public health.”*

During the Summit, South African President, Cyril Ramaphosa, explained exactly what that should mean by asking multilateral agencies to procure vaccines *“for Africa from Africa”* by engaging African vaccine manufacturers directly. He could have added treatments like oxygen to that request as the need to invest more in local oxygen producers and service providers was endorsed by the Africa CDC in a **Joint Statement** with Every Breath Counts in February 2022.

Success in the global effort to prevent a repeat of the tragic oxygen crises during the COVID-19 pandemic will only be achieved when doctors never again have to desperately search for pulse oximeters and affordable and reliable sources of oxygen for their hospitals.

That this is still happening means that we are far from achieving the grand vision of the 2nd Global COVID-19 Summit to *“end the acute phase of the COVID-19 pandemic and ensure that COVID-19 becomes a treatable respiratory disease.”*

Contact

Leith Greenslade
Coordinator, Every Breath Counts Coalition
leith@justactions.org
+1 917 969 6084