



STATEMENT

The World Bank Pandemic Fund And Access to Medical Oxygen

World Bank Annual Meetings

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The Every Breath Counts Coalition calls on the World Bank and its donors to ensure that the new **financial intermediary fund for pandemic prevention, preparedness, and response** (Pandemic Fund), provides a dedicated stream of additional, long-term financing to strengthen access to medical oxygen in **low- and middle-income countries** (LMICs).

According to the **World Health Organization** (WHO), oxygen is an essential medicine with no substitute. The world saw just how essential during the COVID-19 pandemic, when hospitals struggled to supply the vast amounts of medical oxygen needed to treat patients.

The resulting oxygen shortages were catastrophic in many LMICs, elevating patient deaths, traumatizing families, debilitating healthcare workers, and destroying trust in health systems.

In April 2020, the World Bank was one of the first international organizations to respond providing \$US160 billion **COVID-19 Crisis Response Plan** to help countries with the immediate health consequences of the pandemic and bolster economic recovery. Many countries were able to use this financing to improve COVID-19 treatment facilities, including by increasing oxygen supplies.

With this early support, **Somalia, Bangladesh, Nepal, India, Tajikistan, Kenya, Tanzania**, and many more countries were able to install new oxygen plants, tanks, cylinders, concentrators, and the diagnostic tools (e.g., pulse oximeters, patient monitors, etc.), and therapies (e.g, ventilators, BiPAP,CPAP, etc) needed to keep COVID-19 patients alive.

But despite this support, many LMIC health systems still do not have enough medical oxygen or the workforce needed to operate and maintain the equipment. This renders them dangerously exposed to further oxygen shortages in the face of another respiratory pandemic, which experts say is likely.

All LMICs require systems that can respond quickly to surges in demand for medical oxygen. We must never forget the rapid escalation in COVID-19 patients needing oxygen during the pandemic, especially in countries like India, where the daily need for medical oxygen to treat COVID-19 patients increased tenfold between April and May 2021.

The Pandemic Fund can play a critical role in ensuring that no country ever again experiences devastating shortages of medical oxygen by helping countries prepare their health systems with adequate oxygen to withstand the exponential surges that can occur during pandemics.

The **Access to COVID-19 Accelerator (ACT-A) Oxygen Emergency Taskforce**, which was established in February 2021 to lead the multilateral oxygen emergency support to LMICs, is well-placed to serve as an accredited implementing entity, or operational arm, of the Pandemic Fund to coordinate oxygen support at country, regional, and global levels.

Unitaid, which is hosted and administered by the World Health Organization, chairs the Taskforce. It includes the major UN and global health and development agencies, NGOs, and donors who have been providing oxygen support to LMICs during COVID-19.¹

In just 18 months, the Taskforce has mobilized \$US1 billion to support more than 100 countries. It has built strong relationships with LMIC governments, regional political bodies, and with industry. Policies and procedures to procure and deliver liquid oxygen, oxygen plants, and mobile concentrators, as well as diagnostic tools and therapies, have been established and improved over time.

The Pandemic Fund should leverage the Taskforce's coordinating power, expertise, and global network to maximize the cost-effectiveness and impact of the oxygen support it provides for pandemic prevention, preparedness, and response.

We encourage eligible agencies to submit strong proposals to strengthen medical oxygen access in the LMICs at risk of further shortages when the Pandemic Fund issues its **first call for investment proposals** in November 2022.

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¹ The ACT-A Oxygen Emergency Taskforce is chaired by Unitaid and includes WHO, UNICEF, The Global Fund, World Bank, UNDP, UNOPs, Clinton Health Access Initiative (CHAI), PATH, Every Breath Counts Coalition, Save the Children, Access to Medicine Foundation, USAID, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, ELMA Philanthropies, and others. The taskforce is currently in the process of pivoting to a Global Oxygen Alliance to continue its vital work helping countries close the wide gaps in access to medical oxygen that remain and place them at risk of shortages in the context of another pandemic.