



## JOINT STATEMENT

### CALLING ON ALL WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION MEMBER STATES TO DEVELOP AND FINANCE MEDICAL OXYGEN ROADMAPS BY 2025

10 May 2024

*“There is a need for global solidarity to ensure that everyone who needs oxygen regardless of where they come from is able to get it in a timely manner that saves lives.”*

COVID-19 survivor living with HIV, Kenya, 2024

As 100 governments and global health agencies head to Dakar, Senegal, to discuss the implementation of the milestone **Increasing Access to Medical Oxygen Resolution** adopted by the World Health Assembly (WHA) in 2023, we call on all parties to commit to support the development, financing, and implementation of national plans for equitable access to medical oxygen by 2025. This is critical to accelerate both the achievement of the **Sustainable Development Goals** (SDGs) and to prepare health systems for the next respiratory pandemic.

We applaud the World Health Organization (WHO) for hosting the first-ever **National Oxygen Scale-Up Framework Meeting: Road to Oxygen Access** (14 to 16 May) and for its practical focus on a model **Medical Oxygen Scale-up Template** that governments can use to develop their national plans. Clause 2 of the landmark WHO Oxygen Resolution urges all Member States to *“develop costed national plans to increase access to quality assured, affordable medical oxygen systems and personnel to meet the identified needs of all patients.”*

Medical oxygen is an essential medicine without substitute for the treatment of a wide range of communicable and non-communicable diseases and for injuries that together are killing 25 million every year; 40% of all human deaths according to the **Global Burden of Disease**. Affected patients range from the preterm newborn in respiratory distress, to the road traffic accident victim needing surgery, to the elderly patient with COPD, and many more. Because of such wide application, increasing access to medical oxygen can help governments make progress on seven of the nine areas targeted by the health SDGs.<sup>1</sup> Few other health interventions have such a broad impact on the health SDGs.

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<sup>1</sup> SDGs 3.1 (maternal survival), 3.2 (newborn and child survival), 3.3 (HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, malaria), 3.4 (chronic diseases), 3.5 (substance abuse), 3.6 (road traffic accidents), and 3.8 (Universal Health Coverage).

Further, all stakeholders must never forget the tragedy of the medical oxygen shortages during COVID-19, the loss of millions of lives, and the trauma so many families endured searching for oxygen. According to **recent estimates**, the risk of another respiratory pandemic remains high, with a 66% chance in the next 25 years. Properly resourced and implemented national oxygen roadmaps can ensure that countries will be ready to meet the surging need for medical oxygen and related diagnostic tools (e.g., pulse oximeters) and therapies when the next crisis hits.

We note the leadership of the **26 governments** that have already developed, or are developing, national medical oxygen roadmaps, but remain disappointed that they represent just 20% of all 134 low- and middle-income countries. Without medical oxygen scale-up plans, 108 countries risk failing to achieve most of the health-related SDGs and mass fatalities during another respiratory pandemic. There is an urgent need for action.

In the next five years, we encourage governments to work closely with each other, with global health partners, and with civil society – and ensure the active participation of affected patients, families, and communities – in developing, financing, and implementing national medical oxygen plans. Governments must increase domestic spending to implement their national oxygen plans and international donors should offer support to those countries who need it. For example, donors should invest in the **Global Oxygen Alliance** (GO<sub>2</sub>AL), chaired by The Global Fund, Unitaid, the Africa Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa CDC), and the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), so it can increase support to a subset of high-need countries.

The World Bank's **Pandemic Fund** is another existing opportunity for eligible governments to finance the implementation of their national medical oxygen plans. A **second round of funding** (\$US500 million) is now available, and more will be coming. We encourage governments to apply for funding to implement those aspects of their medical oxygen plans related to pandemic prevention, preparedness, and response, including improving early warning and disease surveillance systems to detect the emergence of a respiratory pandemic (e.g., using pulse oximeters as surveillance tools), equipping laboratory systems to test for respiratory pathogens where oxygen may be needed, and training the health workforce (e.g., clinicians and biomedical engineers) to install, operate, and maintain all of the medicines (e.g., oxygen), and respiratory care equipment (e.g., ventilators/masks) needed to keep patients alive during a respiratory pandemic.

We call on donors and global health agencies to provide support in ways that strengthen the local design, manufacturing, and ownership of innovative and existing medical oxygen-related technologies, heeding the calls from low- and middle-income countries, especially those on the African continent as outlined in the Africa CDC **New Public Health Order**, for greater self-reliance in the provision of essential medicines and medical devices. Deeper engagement with the medical oxygen industry (liquid, plant, concentrator, pulse oximeter, respiratory therapy, etc.) to deliver on this objective is urgently needed. It is also vital that donors and global health agencies invest more in the medical oxygen workforce - the public servants, clinicians, and biomedical and clinical engineers who are needed to install, operate, and maintain a well-functioning oxygen system.

In Dakar, we also urge Member States to take advantage of a new tool developed by the **Lancet Global Health Commission on Medical Oxygen Security** to fulfill the bi-annual reporting requirements of the WHO Oxygen Resolution. A draft **Access to Medical Oxygen Scorecard** (ATMO<sub>2</sub>S) will be presented at the meeting and Member States will be invited to share feedback. As organizations representing many

civil society organizations, we will be sure to hold Member States and the WHO accountable for implementation of the landmark Increasing Access to Medical Oxygen Resolution.

We wish all parties a successful meeting in Dakar and look forward to commitments from all attending governments to ensure that access to medical oxygen (including pulse oximetry) is included in national health plans and pandemic prevention, preparedness, and response strategies. The stakes are high. We must maintain the momentum on access to medical oxygen or pay the price—and we know what the price looks like.

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