



TOGETHER
for health

2020

YEAR IN REVIEW



Dear Supporters,

What a year it's been. For those of us working in global cervical cancer prevention and control, we rang in the New Year feeling energized by the prospect that in 2020, the world would set a course towards ending this disease, a remarkable milestone for global health and for the world.

Anticipation was soon replaced with uncertainty. The emergence of COVID-19 altered the trajectory of our personal and professional lives this year, cutting a swath of both unpredictability and tragedy. We witnessed emergency lockdowns and unprecedented disruptions to essential health services, and the impacts of COVID-19 have yet to fully emerge.

Despite the COVID-19 pandemic's disruption, history was made on November 17th, when the World Health Organization approved its Global Strategy to Accelerate the Elimination of Cervical Cancer as a Public Health Problem. The pandemic prevented us from celebrating this historic occasion in person, but the WHO's virtual launch was inspiring, and brought a sense of urgency to transform the strategy into lives saved.

TogetherHER's work continued in spite of 2020's ongoing challenges. We focused on sharing the achievements of life-saving prevention and treatment programs, demanding action on their behalf, and creating new tools to catalyze increased political and financial support for cervical cancer interventions. Read on for a recap of a tremendously productive year.

I was proud to come on board as TogetherHER's Executive Director in July, picking up on the incredible work that Celina Schocken initiated when she co-founded TogetherHER with Kathy Vizas in 2018. While taking the reins of the organization in the midst of a global pandemic was not ideal, TogetherHER's work is as important as ever. The need to influence policy and practice, to build a strong network of collaboration, and to share the stories of women, families and communities affected by this disease remains at the core of TogetherHER's mission.

A sincere thanks to our partners for their tireless efforts, their perspectives, and their collaborative spirit during this past year. We're looking to add new collaborators in 2021, a year of rejuvenation and renewal as we work to make the WHO elimination strategy a reality.

Thank you, and stay safe,

-Heather & the TogetherHER Team
March, 2021



Jackie, a cervical cancer patient living near Nairobi, Kenya, walking down the street in her neighborhood.

Dedicated to ending cervical cancer around the world

TogetHER for Health, launched in 2018, is a global partnership focused on ending cervical cancer by advancing political will, improving technology and practice, and building awareness. We draw on the strength of our membership, composed of organizations with decades of experience on the frontlines of cervical cancer prevention in low-resource settings, to build support and knowledge among the advocates, health workers, government officials, and others who are needed to make this strategy succeed.

Cervical cancer is highly preventable and treatable, when detected early. Human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccines are safe and protect against several HPV-related cancers, including cervical cancer. Access to regular cervical screening can identify cervical lesions that can be treated, and thus reduce the risk of invasive disease. Expanding access to these interventions can greatly reduce the number of women requiring treatment for invasive cervical disease or palliative care options.

Unfortunately, effective prevention tools only save lives when they can be accessed. In 2020, almost 342,000 women around the world lost their lives to cervical cancer, with another 604,000 being diagnosed, the great majority of these in low- and middle-income countries. Too many women continue to die from this preventable disease. In 2020, the world took steps to change that.

A strategy to end cervical cancer forever

We entered 2020 knowing it would be a critical – possibly THE critical – year in the fight against cervical cancer. Years of tireless advocacy by civil society, country representatives, and women and practitioners impacted by cervical bore fruit in 2020. Following a successful consensus vote by 194 U.N. Member States, the World Health Organization (WHO) launched its Global Strategy to Accelerate the Elimination of Cervical Cancer on November 17th. The three pillars of this strategy – the first ever global plan to eliminate a cancer – are as follows:

- Vaccinating 90% of girls against human papillomavirus (HPV) by 15 years of age;
- Screening 70% of women at ages 35 and 45 for precancerous cervical lesions; and
- Ensuring that 90% of those women in need receive treatment for cervical disease.

Achieving these targets could reduce the number of new cervical cancer cases by more than 42% by 2045, averting 300,000 deaths by 2030 and 14 million deaths by 2070. But the Strategy needs to be transformed into action, and we can't let anything – not even a global pandemic – let us lose focus.



Left: World Health Organization poster on cervical cancer elimination. Right: World Health Organization Director-General Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus at the launch event for the Global Strategy to Accelerate the Elimination of Cervical Cancer on November 17th, 2020.



Left: Lily Project staffer Adilia Navarro providing results to a woman in San Dionisio, Nicaragua. Photo by Jonathan Butcher, courtesy of The Lily Project. *Right:* Nurse Senyana Galeage the Madiba Clinic in Mahalapye, Botswana. Photo credit: Kate Holt/Jhpiego.

Spotlighting expertise

The WHO Strategy is built on increasing access to proven cervical cancer prevention interventions, access that depends on a highly trained, well-equipped global cadre of health providers. TogetHER provides opportunities for experts around the world to discuss key technical issues and describe what's working for their programs, in order to foster an interconnected and mutually supportive global effort to make cervical cancer elimination a reality.

In a year where virtual convenings became the norm, TogetHER's highly successful **webinar series** continued to gather a wide spectrum of participants from around the globe around key topics in cervical cancer prevention, including:

- [Sustaining cervical cancer and sexual and reproductive health programs during COVID-19](#);
- [HPV-based cervical cancer screening](#), which saw increased use as means to provide screening while maintaining social distancing;
- [Advancing cervical cancer treatment in low-resource settings](#);
- [Integrating cervical cancer and HIV programs](#) to bolster the effectiveness of both; and
- [Addressing cervical cancer through the Global Fund](#), which allows countries to apply for support for integrated cervical cancer prevention in HIV programs.

TogetHER published two more **case studies** as part of our series documenting successful cervical cancer programs providing innovative solutions women in low-resource settings, which we feel can provide inspiration and guidance to programs across the world. In 2020, we highlighted:

- [The Lily Project](#), bringing critical healthcare and education with a patient-centered approach to rural Nicaraguan women.
- [The collaboration between Botswana's influential network of nurses and TogetHER member organization Jhpiego](#) to successfully test and then widely implement thermal ablation for cervical cancer prevention in the country.

Our **TogetHER Interviews** series provided a forum for leaders in global cervical prevention to describe the impact of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic on their programs, highlight innovative ways practitioners on the ground sustained services, and describe how working through COVID-19's unique challenge might inform a more effective cervical cancer prevention response in the future. [Seventeen experts](#) – including the leaders of many of our member organizations – provided sobering perspective on the effects of COVID-19 on sexual and reproductive health services for their consumers, and much-needed inspiration on how their respective organizations are responding to meet their needs in the midst of the COVID-19 crisis.



TogetHER Interview Participants

Top Row, L-R: Carrie Hessler-Radelet, PCI, a Global Communities Partner, and Global Communities; Kofi Effah, Cervical Cancer Prevention and Training Centre; Lois Quam, Pathfinder International; Partha Basu, International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC)



Center Row, L-R: Mengistu Asnake Kibret, Pathfinder International; Ellen Starr, Grounds for Health; Karl Hofmann, Population Services International (PSI); Elizabeth Mbuthia, Women 4 Cancer; Groesbeck Parham, University of Zambia/ University of North Carolina



Bottom Row, L-R: Mauricio Maza, Basic Health International; Anielka Medina, The Lily Project; Nikolaj Gilbert, PATH; Leslie Mancuso, Jhpiego

Along those lines, TogetHER recognized an early need to assist providers in building COVID-19 guidelines into sexual and reproductive health programs, in order to ensure that progress made in recent years would not be totally disrupted by the pandemic. In April, we began collecting and updating a [set of resources](#) to support health workers in providing safe, effective care for women in an unprecedented time. We also hosted our first-ever [Twitter chat](#) on April 28th, bringing together a panel of experts to discuss the implications of COVID-19 on our work.

Building bridges to access and innovation

TogetHER's **Cervical Cancer Grants Program** was initiated in 2019 to generate evidence to support increased access to innovative cervical cancer prevention technologies. 2020 saw the completion of projects by our first two grantees:

- Jhpiego's pilot of thermal ablation as a cervical precancer treatment strategy at four high-volume health facilities in Gaborone helped spur wider implementation of thermal ablation across Botswana. The project's success was amplified when the U.S. Centers for Disease Control procured 39 additional thermal ablation machines.
- The MoviCancer Foundation evaluated the impact, feasibility and acceptability of thermal ablation on cervical precancer treatment in three regions of Nicaragua, while also supporting the development of a national protocol for the use of thermal ablation. Due in part to TogetHER's support, ten health providers in Nicaragua were trained and equipped with thermal ablation devices, resulting in 25,000 eligible women receiving for pre-cancerous lesions.

The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria welcomes proposals for integrating cervical cancer services within HIV and AIDS programs. To support Global Fund grantees in understanding and accessing this funding, TogetHER published a [set of helpful briefs](#) in February.

Measuring progress – and demanding more

Achieving the three targets underpinning of the WHO's Cervical Cancer Elimination Strategy – expanded access to HPV vaccinations, cervical cancer screening, and treatment – will require keeping the pressure on policymakers and funders to provide programs critical support. This means taking stock of the global response, highlighting gaps and lauding new contributions.

In November of 2020, TogetHER published its [second annual estimates on funding](#) for cervical cancer prevention in low-income countries (LICs) and lower middle-income countries (LMICs). Our report showed significant increases for both HPV vaccination program and for cervical cancer-screen and treat between 2018 and 2019.

Total funding for HPV vaccination programs in LICs and LMICs for 2019 is estimated at \$65.1 million, an increase of 61.5% from 2018 primarily driven by increased support for HPV vaccination programs by Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance. Estimated total funding for cervical cancer screening and treatment in LICs and LMICs totaled \$56.2 million USD in 2019, an increase of almost 150% due heavily to the scale-up of the PEPFAR-led Go Further partnership. Funding for screen-and-treat was also heavily

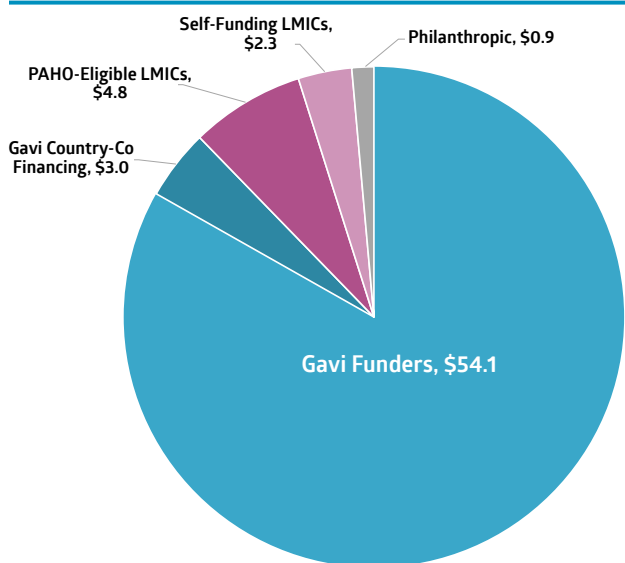


Figure 1. Support for HPV Vaccine Programs in LICs and LMICs in 2019 (US\$ millions)

boosted by new commitments from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and Unitaids, and increased funding for integrating cervical cancer prevention into HIV services in Zambia, Malawi, and Tanzania through the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria.

New commitments were announced in 2020 that highlight continued growth in funding for cervical cancer prevention in LICs and LMICs. Under Gavi's forthcoming 5.0 framework, HPV vaccine supply is expected to increase from both existing (MSD and GSK) and new manufacturers (Innovax, Serum Institute of India, and Walvax). If these supply expectations materialize and the impact of COVID-19 on demand and country uptake is minimized, Gavi's HPV program has the potential to reach up to 84 million girls from 2021-2025. Go Further will expand the number of countries in which it is active from eight in 2019 to twelve in 2021.

TogetHER applauds these increased commitments to funding lifesaving solutions. However, total funding remains a fraction of the estimated total need of \$10.5 billion between 2019 and 2030 to support the WHO's elimination agenda.

Building a global cervical cancer response capable of achieving elimination will not just require funding; it will also require improved coordination and integration with other women's health programs, and sustained political commitment regardless of other pressing health emergencies. In 2020, TogetHER coordinated two Calls to Action, convening our partners' voices to advocate for increased integration of

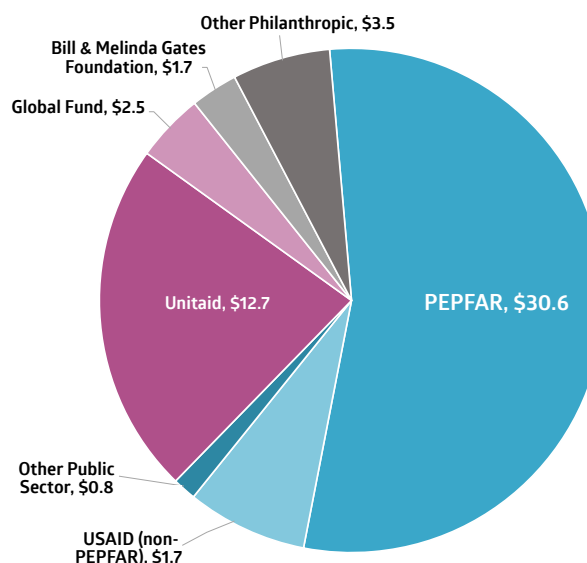


Figure 2. Support for Cervical Cancer Screen-and-Treat in LICs and LMICs in 2019 (US\$ millions)

cervical cancer services into family planning programs, and highlighting the need to sustain women's health programs during COVID-19. We also supported FP2020's call towards a new commitment to rights-based, integrated sexual and reproductive health care during and after COVID-19.

The Programme Coordinating Board of the Joint United Nations Programme for HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) included a thematic segment focused on the integration of HIV/AIDS and Cervical Cancer prevention & treatment services in its December meeting. TogetHER Executive Director Heather White was invited to provide testimony at the meeting, during which she highlighted the tragic link between cervical cancer and HIV and offered recommendations to guide the incorporation of cervical cancer prevention services as part of UNAIDS' forthcoming Global AIDS Strategy for 2021-2026.

Inspiration for cervical cancer elimination

Eliminating cervical cancer globally can seem like an abstract exercise in modeling. To bring this critical goal into focus, TogetHER continued our efforts to bring forward the stories of women impacted by cervical cancer and the practitioners seeking to support them. In 2020, TogetHER and the American Cancer Society expanded our **Faces of Hope** series with a focus on India, in which we spotlighted a breadth of perspectives, from a cervical cancer survivor-turned-advocate to a doctor applying over two decades of experience to protect women.

2020 also witnessed an outpouring of emotion worldwide in response to racial inequality, ignited by the killing of George Floyd in Minnesota in May of 2020. This tragedy underscored racism's deadly impact across societies, reflected by unacceptable disparities in cervical cancer outcomes for communities of color in the United States. We will not eliminate cervical cancer until all women – regardless of race or geography – are treated as equals in society, and provided equal access to women's health care.

The uncertain impact of COVID-19

COVID-19 has disrupted efforts to reduce health disparities around the world, and cervical cancer prevention and treatment programs have not been spared. HPV vaccination rates experienced reductions, in many cases higher than those of other vaccines. Lockdowns and social distancing policies implemented to safeguard patients from potential exposure to COVID-19 have led to many women postponing or forgoing cervical cancer screening. New modeling projects that for each year of delay in scaling up the three elimination intervention targets, up to 326,000 additional women will die if catch-up vaccination and screening programs are not implemented.

Even in crisis, TogetHER and our partners see potential for a successful response to COVID-19 be a multiplier across health outcomes more broadly. An increased emphasis on self-sampling and HPV DNA testing as the primary screening test could be the key to screening more women at scale, while reducing the number of women needing to present themselves to clinics. Viral testing technology scaled globally for COVID-19 will also be applicable for HPV DNA testing, which is more accurate and less invasive than conventional screening methods. Rollout of COVID-19 vaccines in low-resource settings has been unacceptably slow compared to high-income countries, but we're hopeful that correcting this situation will not only highlight the power of immunization but also potentially provide a platform for catch-up HPV immunization programs in adolescent girls.

Supporting our coalition in an unpredictable year

TogetHER's impact is built on the expertise and experience of our member organizations: the American Cancer Society, Basic Health International (BHI), Global Health Labs (formerly Global Good), Jhpiego, Pathfinder, Population Services International (PSI), and Project Concern International (PCI), A Global Communities Partner.

From the outset of the pandemic, TogetHER's regular coalition meetings provided a forum for members to describe how programs were being affected and to seek guidance and inspiration from their peers. Through our webinars, case studies, the TogetHER Interview series, and our social media efforts, we aimed to shine a light on the essential efforts of our members in an unbelievably challenging year. We look forward to seeing our partners' cervical cancer prevention programs emerging from this trying time stronger and even more focused on saving women's lives, given new momentum by the WHO's strategy for elimination.



A nurse with The Lily Project's mobile health clinic serving women in rural communities of Matagalpa, Nicaragua. Credit: The Lily Project.

TogetHER we can end cervical cancer

TogetHER isn't a big organization, but we're making a difference toward a massive goal. In just three short years, TogetHER's advocacy, grants, and partnerships have changed care practices around the world. In 2021, we'll keep:

- Advancing political will necessary to sustain the global movement for cervical cancer elimination;
- Improving technology and practice to enhance and expand effective programs; and
- Building awareness to keep the world focused on ending this preventable killer of women.

We are making a difference for women and families—and we are just getting started. Thank you for your support as we work for a world where cervical cancer no longer threatens any woman, anywhere.



Heather White
Executive Director



Kathy Vizas
Board Chair

TogetHER Partners



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