

TOGETHER
for health

**2021 YEAR
IN REVIEW**



Dear Supporters,

For all of us partnering to make the elimination of cervical cancer a reality, 2021 was the year that vision took shape following the launch of the Global Strategy to Accelerate the Elimination of Cervical Cancer by the World Health Organization in November of 2020. The strategy has been developed based on global models which show that significant scale up access and availability of safe, effective HPV vaccines to reduce transmission of high-risk HPV types, along with screening to detect early abnormalities, and access to timely treatment, will effectively end this cancer – an unprecedented opportunity.

For TogetHER, 2021 was a year of action to drive progress to fulfill the WHO global elimination strategy, from the development and launch of an innovative cervical health advocacy campaign borne from our collaboration with Scope Impact in Kenya, to the launch of an exciting new round of funding through our Cervical Cancer Grants Program, to building consensus for the modernization of cervical cancer screening and treatment through support of global donors.

This 2021 Year in Review is a great overview of the past year's activities. I'd also recommend taking a look at [TogetHER's Impact Report](#), published in March of last year, which goes a little deeper into our strategy and accomplishments to date.

Looking back on the accomplishments of the past year energizes us for the challenges ahead. We're not going to let up in 2022, with so many barriers to ending cervical cancer remaining. Insufficient resources. The need for political commitment to translate into targeted action. Stigma and limited awareness. Continued disruptions from the protracted COVID-19 pandemic. Too many girls and women remain at risk of this preventable disease, and our work's not done until that risk is no longer a threat.

We're going to keep the pressure on decisionmakers to properly resource cervical cancer prevention programs around the world. We'll continue to build and strengthen the networks connecting communities to passionate practitioners and evidence-based strategies. And we'll remain dedicated to sharing the stories of girls and women, families, and communities impacted by cervical cancer, in addition to the advocates and health workers who've made saving women's lives their personal and professional commitment.

As our name implies, we won't – and literally can't – do it alone. We're grateful for the collaborations that have sustained our field in these recent years and can't wait to continue to expand our list of partners and cervical cancer champions in the year to come.

Thank you, and stay safe,

-Heather & the TogetHER Team

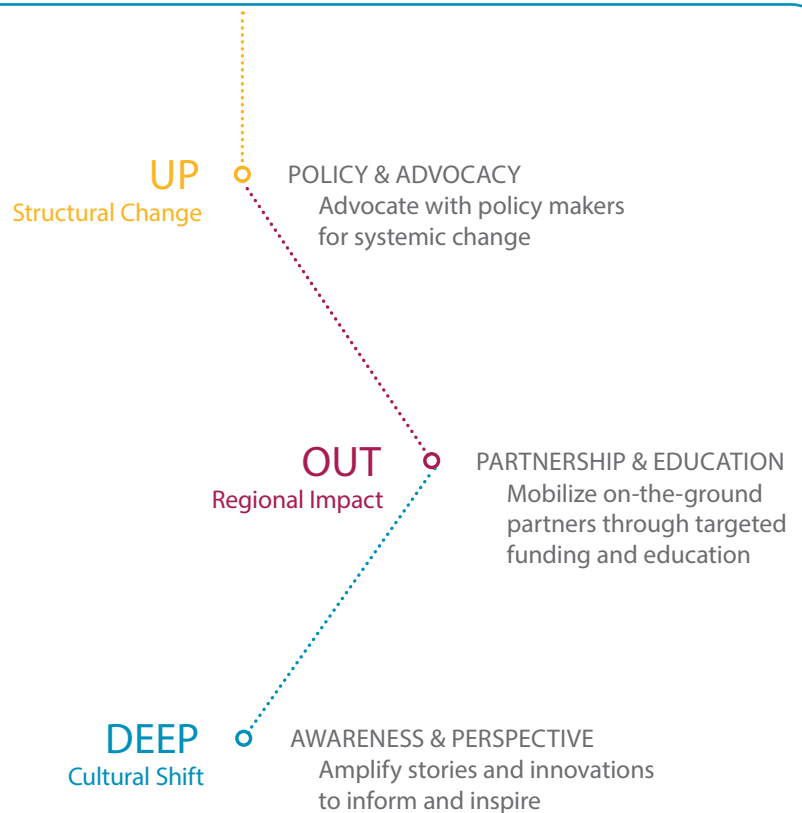
On the steps of the Alabama State Capitol, September 2021. L-R: Tom Harmon, External Relations Director; Kathy Vizas, Co-Founder/Chief Strategy Officer; Heather White, Executive Director; Sarah Bowler, Technical Advisor



Early in 2021, TogetHER published our **Impact Report**, which outlines what inspires our efforts to support global cervical cancer elimination, as well as our approach to catalyzing change to make elimination a reality:

- **Scaling up** to create structural change through policy and advocacy;
- **Scaling out** to drive regional impact through partnership and education; and
- **Scaling deep** to address cultural barriers by increasing awareness and amplifying critical perspectives.

TogetHER's activities in 2021 span these three categories, reflecting the need to address the wide spectrum of challenges standing between women and a world without cervical cancer.



Dedicated to ending cervical cancer around the world

TogetHER for Health, launched in 2017, 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 member network, composed of organizations with decades of experience working on the frontlines of sexual and reproductive health and rights in low-resource settings, to build support and knowledge among 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 numerous 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.

A strategy to end cervical cancer – and new developments

This past year marked the first full calendar year since the WHO launched its Global Strategy to Accelerate the Elimination of Cervical Cancer in November of 2020. The Strategy – the first-ever global plan to eliminate a cancer – is constructed around three critical access targets:

- Vaccinating 90% of girls against 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.

In line with the Elimination Strategy, the WHO released updated guidance in 2021 for screening and treatment of pre-cancer lesions for cervical cancer prevention, a process in which TogetHER's Executive Director participated. The revised guidelines provide a clear mandate and scientific rationale for global adoption of HPV testing as the recommended screening method for women worldwide.

Implementing this change globally provides an opportunity to more accurately screen women, ideally using samples collected by women themselves. Such an approach can reduce the burden on women to travel long distances to health clinics and allow health practitioners to focus their efforts on the women most in need of in-person services.

The ability to meet the Strategy's goals may be further enhanced by a growing body of evidence suggesting that a single dose of HPV vaccine may offer a similar level of protection as the current two-dose regimen. This offers a path to significantly reduce costs and logistical difficulty associated with HPV vaccination programs.

But – strategies and guidelines don't save lives, and prevention only works when it reaches the women who need it. Almost 342,000 women lost their lives to cervical cancer in 2020 and another 604,000 were diagnosed with the disease. The overwhelming majority of these women reside in low- and middle-income countries where cervical cancer prevention interventions are difficult or even impossible to access.

Scaling Up Through Policy and Advocacy

Achieving the three targets underpinning the WHO's Cervical Cancer Elimination Strategy will require keeping the pressure on policymakers and funders to provide critical political and financial support, and keeping leaders accountable to deliver on the policies and plans they put in place.

The United States Government has been a major supporter of global HPV vaccination programs as a significant contributor of the Gavi Alliance, and for cervical cancer screening and treatment through the Go Further partnership consisting of the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), the United Nations Joint Programme for HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), the George W. Bush Institute, Merck, and Roche. More recently, United States support for cervical cancer prevention has manifested through the launch of the Partnerships for Enhanced Engagement in Research (PEER) program funded through the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering & Medicine.

Still, with resources insufficient to fully fund the Elimination agenda and lack of clarity on when updated WHO guidelines will begin to impact screening and treatment outcomes in low-resource settings, the need for United States leadership in global cervical cancer prevention has never been greater. The transition in January 2021 to the incoming Biden administration, along with President Biden's well-documented personal commitment to cancer control, represented an urgent opportunity to advocate for increased federal funding and accelerated implementation of updated WHO guidelines into U.S.-funded cervical cancer prevention activities. [TogetHER coordinated a call to action co-signed by 21 organizations](#) stressing the need for the Biden administration to make defining investments toward the elimination of cervical cancer.

Co-signers of TogetHER's 2021 Calls to Action



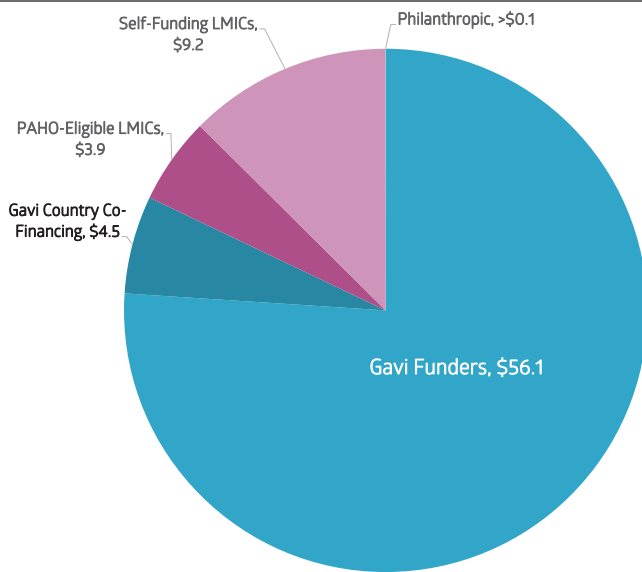


Figure 1. Support for HPV Vaccine Programs in LICs and LMICs in 2020 (US\$ millions)

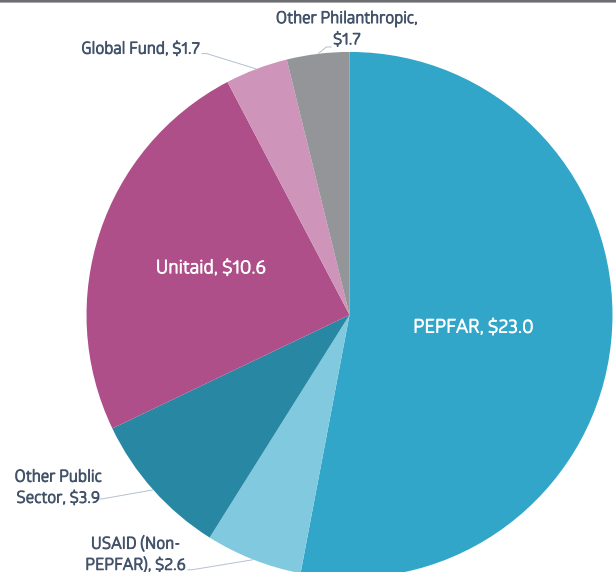


Figure 2. Support for Cervical Cancer Screen-and-Treat in LICs and LMICs in 2020 (US\$ millions)

The elimination of cervical cancer will require funders to prioritize resources to the most effective evidence-based strategies. In August, [TogetHER worked with AVAC to organize a coalition of 39 organizations](#) advocating to major international funders of cervical cancer prevention – including the U.S. Government through PEPFAR and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), and the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, TB, and Malaria – for expedited implementation of the updated WHO guidelines for the screening and treatment of cervical cancer.

Throughout the year, we also worked closely with our member, Pathfinder International, to initiate outreach to potential congressional champions to ensure sustainable funding commitments and support for cervical cancer prevention in programs such as PEPFAR and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

TogetHER also participated in several critical consultations seeking to advance cervical cancer prevention in low-resource settings, including an October event organized by Roche to discuss the transition to HPV testing in Africa and a virtual think tank discussion organized by Abbott Laboratories in November outlining current challenges to scaling up cervical cancer prevention in Africa and the potential impact of HPV testing.

Data is a powerful advocacy tool when seeking to make the case for investment in cervical cancer prevention. To mark the one-year anniversary of the launch of the WHO's Cervical Cancer Elimination Strategy in November, TogetHER released [our third annual estimates of funding](#) for cervical cancer prevention in low-income countries (LICs) and lower middle-income countries (LMICs), covering 2018-2020.

Concerns that resource diversions driven by COVID-19 would trigger a massive reduction in funding for cervical cancer prevention were thankfully not borne out in 2020 funding data, as total funding remained relatively level. Total funding for HPV vaccination programs in LICs and LMICs for 2020 is estimated at \$73.7 million, a slight increase of 8.8% from 2019. Estimated total funding for cervical cancer screening and preventive treatment in LICs and LMICs totaled \$43.4 million in 2020, a significant reduction from 2019 figures, but much higher than 2018 funding levels.

According to WHO projections, an estimated \$10.5 billion in total funding will be needed between 2019 and 2030 to sufficiently resource cervical cancer elimination in low- and lower middle-income countries. TogetHER estimates for actual funding in 2019 and 2020 – the first two years of the 12-year projections – only total \$240 million, setting a funding pace of only \$1.4 billion for the 12-year period, less than 10% of WHO's projected need. The lives of millions of women

hang in the balance if we fail to fill this significant funding gap.

Scaling Out Through Partnership, Education, and Funding

TogetHER is also committed to utilizing our networks and resources to enhance programs on the ground through targeted engagement and catalytic funding that can have immediate impact in communities while providing programs around the world with evidence of what works.

Cervical cancer is the most frequently diagnosed cancer among Kenyan women between the ages of 15 and 44 years old, resulting in 3,200 annual deaths from the disease. Low awareness of cervical cancer compounds a lack of access to effective screening and treatment, often resulting in women only being diagnosed when they reach an advanced stage.

TogetHER partnered with Scope Impact to tackle this problem head on. [The Kizazi Chetu campaign](#), which means 'Our Generation' in Swahili, was designed to catalyze a cervical health movement in Kenya through strategic communications building awareness and linking women to lifesaving screening and treatment services.

Kizazi Chetu organized a network including over 20 Kenyan organizations and a diverse group of Kenyan policymakers, service providers, and influencers. The campaign deployed a blend of traditional and social media activities, including tweet chats, print and online article placements. Kizazi Chetu garnered 64 million social media impressions and 29 million impressions from traditional and online news media, and increased Google searches for "cervical cancer screening" by over 300%.

The true test of the campaign is whether it can influence women to seek out health services. Kizazi Chetu service provider partners saw demand for cervical cancer screening over the campaign period increase by over 300% when compared to the same period in the prior year, alongside a less dramatic increase in screenings at government facilities. The campaign was designed to adapt and grow to fit the context. In November, local Kenyan partners, led by the Africa Cancer Foundation, the Matibabu Foundation, and Tiba Foundation, launched a campaign to recognize the tireless efforts of frontline health workers across 14 counties of Kenya's Lake Economic Region. The campaign aims

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ABOUT
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HEALTH**



to create cervical cancer ambassadors among health providers, and ultimately reach 10 million Kenyans at over 100 hospitals and clinics in 14 counties with information about cervical cancer, as well as access to vaccinations, screening, and treatment.

TogetHER's **Cervical Cancer Grants Program** was initiated in 2019, providing targeted grants designed to generate evidence supporting increased access to innovative cervical cancer prevention technologies. In September of 2021, we launched a new call for proposals and expanded the scope to encompass two tracks: the first to improve demand-side interventions to increase uptake of all cervical cancer prevention services, and the second to support supply-side interventions to accelerate adoption of improved technologies in cervical cancer prevention. From a total of 43 organizations working across 23 countries, [TogetHER selected four proposals](#) for funding:

- The partnership between **BIO Ventures for Global Health (BVGH)** and **the Rwandan Biomedical Centre (RBC)** will train providers to incorporate the SEVIA (smartphone-enhanced VIA) tool into their services, improving on existing cervical cancer screening services within Rwanda and offering a model for improved visual screening that can be applied internationally.
- **The Cameroon Baptist Convention Health Services (CBCHS)** will implement a mother-daughter cervical cancer prevention approach in two rural communities in Cameroon, with mothers receiving cervical cancer screening services as their daughters simultaneously receive HPV vaccination.
- **Grounds for Health** will facilitate the introduction of HPV testing through self-sampling within their Kenyan program, seeking to identify best practices in the implementation of HPV testing and treatment programs in rural areas, and promoting local and global dissemination of effective program elements.
- **ROSE Foundation** will work to address issues around communicating the importance of cervical cancer screening in multi-ethnic, multi-lingual and

multi-cultural Malaysia, strengthen understanding of barriers to cervical cancer prevention as a step toward their removal, and build a sustainable program that normalizes cervical screening, encouraging women to seek out services.

Both Kizazi Chetu and the efforts of our grantees will continue through 2022, and we look forward to providing updates.

Scaling Deep Through Sharing Knowledge and Perspectives

The pervasive global nature of cervical cancer places the disease's impact and programs seeking to mitigate that impact in a multitude of geographic and cultural contexts. TogetHER provides opportunities



Top photo: Courtesy of Grounds for Health
Bottom photo: Courtesy of ROSE Foundation

for practitioners and advocates to share their expertise and inspiration with their global peers, building a truly global network standing in solidarity against cervical cancer.

TogetHER's ongoing quarterly webinar series added four new conversations in 2021, convening participants from around the world to discuss key topics in cervical cancer prevention. Our 2021 webinars included:

- A [January conversation](#) with staff from Unitaid and the Gavi Alliance, discussing global investments in cervical cancer prevention, detection and treatment;
- Our [February webinar](#) highlighting the programs implemented by Jhpiego and MoviCancer under the first round of the Cervical Cancer Grants Program;
- An [April discussion](#) featuring our member PATH and its work compiling and evaluating evidence around the potential use of single-dose HPV vaccination; and
- The [October webinar](#) presenting highlights and results of the initial cervical health campaign from Kizazi Chetu in Kenya.

In the months following the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, we created our TogetHER Interviews series to provide leaders in global cervical cancer control an opportunity to discuss challenges and provide their perspectives on COVID-19's immediate impact on programs to safeguard women's health in low-resource settings.

In 2021, [we asked a select few participants](#) from 2020's interviews to revisit the topic and provide perspectives on how their own work had changed in the subsequent year. Our conversations with the Nicaragua-based Lily Project's Anielka Medina, Women 4 Cancer's Elizabeth Mbuthia from Kenya, and Grounds for Health's Ellen Starr covered the lingering disruptions COVID-19 has borne on cervical cancer prevention programs in low-resource settings, but also highlighted the creativity and resolve that have not only sustained programs, but in some cases enhanced them in this uncertain health landscape.

COVID-19 and Global Cervical Cancer Prevention in 2021

It remains impossible to discuss any global health endeavor while ignoring the context of the still-evolving COVID-19 pandemic, which continues to add risk and logistical burden to programs providing cervical cancer prevention services around the world. COVID-19 is now entering its third year of disrupting and delaying HPV vaccination and cervical screening and treatment programs.

Each HPV vaccination missed due to COVID-19 increases the risk that a woman unprotected against high-risk HPV is at increased risk of persistent infection of HPV. Each lost screening opportunity heightens the chances that pre-cancerous lesions, left undetected and untreated, may develop into early or invasive disease which presents too late for intervention.

At the same time, efforts to mitigate COVID-19 around the world provided insight into new paths forward for cervical cancer prevention. In [a piece published in January for Cervical Cancer Awareness Month](#), TogetHER collaborated with Cervical Cancer Action for Elimination to outline where new capacity necessitated by the pandemic offers opportunities to strengthen cervical cancer prevention programs, including through increased HPV testing via self-sampling and new innovations in telehealth services. Access to COVID-19 vaccines in low- and lower middle-income countries is being provided at far too slow a pace, but we remain hopeful that



L-R: Anielka Medina, The Lily Project; Elizabeth Mbuthia, Women 4 Cancer; Ellen Starr, Grounds for Health

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.

Still, as Raveena Chowdhury of MSI Reproductive Choices put in [a 2021 Devex piece](#), “We’re going to go back five to ten years in terms of service volumes as a result of this.” Potential cuts to critical funding for foreign aid will only worsen an already difficult situation.

Supporting our coalition in an unpredictable year

In 2021, TogetHER continued to serve as a central convening point for the expertise and experience of our member organizations: the American Cancer Society, Basic Health International (BHI), Global Communities, Global Health Labs, Jhpiego, Pathfinder, and Population Services International (PSI). We’re proud to be associated with this formidable group of global health change-makers brought together by the goal of cervical cancer elimination.

In addition to the members of TogetHER, we would like to thank our collaborating partners and supporters, including Panorama Global, the Women

to Watch Foundation, Maverick Collective, Cervical Cancer Action for Elimination, Lisa Rose/COLECTIVO, the University of Alabama at Birmingham, Scope Impact, the Tiba Foundation, Human Rights Watch, the Matibabu Foundation, AVAC, Conquering Cancer, and all of the organizations who share TogetHER’s commitment to the global elimination of cervical cancer.

TogetHER we can end cervical cancer

The scale of the challenge is great, but the opportunity to forever end cervical cancer is too important for our resolve to weaken. If we’re successful, future generations of women can live the rest of their lives free of the fear that this disease will steal them from their families and communities.

TogetHER is proud of the strides we took in 2021 toward making this goal a reality. 2022 is already proving to be a year of collaboration and determination. We’re grateful for the support and partnerships that have taken us to this point. Thank you for your support as we work for a world where cervical cancer no longer threatens any woman, anywhere.

TogetHER Members





MOBILIZING THE WORLD TO END CERVICAL CANCER

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