

January 19, 2021

Joseph R. Biden
President-Elect of the United States

Dear President-Elect Biden,

Congratulations on your election to the Presidency of the United States, from a coalition of organizations working collaboratively across the globe to increase access to evidence-based cervical cancer vaccination, screening, and treatment. We are proud to have joined forces with multiple U.S. Government agencies involved in global women's health, including the National Institutes of Health/National Cancer Institute (NIH/NCI), the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), and the U.S. Department of Defense (DOD).

On November 17th of 2020, the world committed to eliminating cervical cancer, a preventable disease threatening the lives of millions of women around the world, including many in the United States. To achieve this unprecedented goal, the U.S. Government must sustain its critical leadership role in global cervical cancer prevention/control and prioritize the resources necessary to support life-saving programs. For every dollar invested in cervical cancer prevention and treatment, at least \$3.20 will be returned to the global economy through 2050.ⁱ

The tools to prevent and treat cervical cancer are effective, affordable, and scalable. Safe, effective vaccines can prevent cervical cancer-causing strains of the human papillomavirus (HPV). Cervical screening can identify cervical lesions that can be easily removed with portable and easy-to-use devices before the lesions become cancerous. Unfortunately, many women around the world, including women in the United States (notably from poor communities and communities of color), lack access to these interventions. And without this access, women suffer terribly and die during what should be their most productive years. In 2020, 342,000 women – 90% of whom live in low- or middle-income countries – lost their lives to this preventable disease, and deaths continue to rise each year.ⁱⁱ

We are thrilled to witness a dedicated champion in the global fight against cancer ascend to the U.S. Presidency. Under your leadership as Vice President, accelerated cervical cancer control was highlighted as a key focus of the Cancer Moonshot Initiative.ⁱⁱⁱ Now, just as your administration begins its work, new momentum has emerged to not just control, but to also eliminate cervical cancer as a threat to women's health everywhere.

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 in November of 2020.^{iv} 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.^v

Leadership by the United States in global cervical cancer prevention is already making major contributions to these pillars:

- Bipartisan support for Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, has helped ensure access to HPV vaccines for almost four million girls in low-resource settings.^{vi,vii}
- Cervical cancer screening and treatment of women living with HIV has been scaled up dramatically in eight countries in Sub-Saharan Africa through the Go Further program, which falls under the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR).^{viii}
- United States Government funding for innovative cervical cancer prevention and treatment tools through the National Institutes of Health's National Cancer Institute has been instrumental in delivering new, cost-effective tools that improve the ability of providers to protect women's health.^{ix}
- U.S. investments in collaboration and science through the Partnerships for Enhanced Engagement in Research (PEER) mechanism jointly sponsored by the National Academy of Sciences and USAID are critical to inform our understanding of effective, integrated service delivery models, and thus improve women's health.^x

Continued strategic investments by the U.S. Government will be necessary to end preventable cervical cancer deaths.

We understand that addressing the COVID-19 pandemic will be the most urgent and critical task you will inherit. COVID-19 has disrupted efforts across all health areas here in the United States and abroad, and cervical cancer prevention and treatment programs have not been spared. Reductions in HPV vaccination rates mirror those of other vaccines, and lockdowns and social distancing policies designed to mitigate the risk from COVID-19 have led to many women forgoing cervical cancer screening.^{xi,xii} 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.^{xiii} We must work collectively to reverse these trends.

A successful response to COVID-19 holds opportunities to improve health outcomes more broadly. An increased emphasis on self-sampling and HPV DNA testing as the primary screening test provides an opportunity to screen women at scale, without requiring physical visits to clinics for the vast majority of women. 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. And potential mass vaccination campaigns for COVID-19 could provide a platform to reach adolescent girls with catch-up HPV immunization programs.^{xiv}

Members and partners of TogetHER for Health recommend the following actions from the incoming Biden Administration:

1. Support the World Health Organization's cervical cancer elimination strategy;
2. Sustain or increase investments in Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, enabling millions of young women and girls to receive the HPV vaccine to prevent cervical cancer later in life;
3. Sustain or increase investments in the Go Further program under PEPFAR to screen and treat women living with HIV for cervical cancer using HPV testing as the primary screening method;
4. Commit to ensuring that cervical cancer vaccination, screening, and treatment services are components of quality, rights-based, client-centered, integrated sexual and reproductive healthcare alongside contraceptive access and prevention, testing, and treatment for HIV, and other sexually transmitted infections;^{xv}
5. Provide U.S. Government support for NIH/NCI and CDC efforts necessary to improve and expand tools and strategies for cervical cancer control; and
6. Utilize COVID-19 mitigation investments to improve global health infrastructure and lab capacity more broadly.

The United States has made tremendous contributions to global women’s health. Your administration has been given an opportunity to build on this legacy by making defining investments toward the elimination of cervical cancer forever. We look forward to working with you and your staff to make cervical cancer elimination a reality.

Sincerely,

- TogetHER for Health
- American Cancer Society
- Basic Health International
- Jhpiego
- PATH
- Pathfinder International
- Population Services International
- Project Concern International, a Global Communities Partner
- AVAC
- C5 Collective
- CureCervicalCancer
- Elizabeth Glaser Pediatric AIDS Foundation
- Engender Health
- Global Focus on Cancer
- Go Doc Go
- Grounds for Health
- International Gynecologic Cancer Society
- International Planned Parenthood Federation, Western Hemisphere Region
- Laura Crandall Brown Foundation
- The Lily Project
- MSI Reproductive Choices



CC: Kamala Harris, Vice President-Elect of the United States
 Ron Klain, Chief of Staff
 Antony Blinken, Nominee for Secretary of State
 Xavier Becerra, Nominee for Secretary of Health and Human Services

Linda Thomas-Greenfield, Nominee for U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations
Neera Tandin, Nominee for Director of the Office of Management and Budget
Vivek Murthy, Nominee for Surgeon General
Frances Collins, Director of the National Institutes of Health
Lloyd Austin, Nominee for Secretary of Defense
Rochelle Walensky, Nominee for Director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
Samantha Power, Nominee for Administrator, United States Agency for International Development
Norman Sharpless, Director, National Cancer Institute

ⁱ Cervical Cancer Action for Elimination (2020). “[Cervical Cancer Elimination](#).” Accessed December 10, 2020.

ⁱⁱ International Agency for Research on Cancer (2020). “[Cervix uteri fact sheet](#).” Accessed December 15, 2020.

ⁱⁱⁱ NCI’s Division of Cancer Control and Population Science (2020). “[DCCPS Response and Contribution to the Cancer Moonshot](#).” Responding to recommendations from the Cancer Moonshot Blue Ribbon Panel’s 2016 Report, DCCPS noted the following under “Accelerated Cervical Cancer Control”:

Control of human papillomavirus (HPV)-related cancers and cancer health disparities were specifically identified as high-priority areas in the recommendations of the Blue Ribbon Panel. This proposal is focused on accelerating research in cervical cancer screening, with implications for the United States – where cervical cancer is a health disparity for African-American, American Indian, and Hispanic women, and poor women generally – and globally. The goal is to control cervical cancer by combining new screening tools and simplified vaccination strategies across settings with varying resource levels. Therefore, the initiative promotes extramural research focused on both underserved, low-resource settings in the United States, as well as improving implementation of new risk-based screening and prevention strategies in high-resource settings.

^{iv} World Health Organization (2020). [Global strategy to accelerate the elimination of cervical cancer as a public health problem](#). Published November 17, 2020.

^v Canfell, K, et al. (2020). [Mortality impact of achieving WHO cervical cancer elimination targets: a comparative modelling analysis in 78 low-income and lower-middle-income countries](#). *The Lancet*. 395:10224, P591-603.

^{vi} TogetHER for Health (2020). [Investing in Global Cervical Cancer Prevention: Resources for Low-Income and Lower Middle-Income Countries in 2019](#), November 2020. In 2019, funders of Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance provided US\$ 54.1 million for HPV vaccination programs. U.S. Government pledges to Gavi in 2019 [totaled US\\$ 290 million](#).

^{vii} Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance (2020). “Gavi’s Impact: Human Papillomavirus Vaccine Support.” <https://www.gavi.org/types-support/vaccine-support/human-papillomavirus> Accessed December 10, 2020.

^{viii} Ibid. In FY2019, the Go Further Partnership – coordinated by PEPFAR and consisting of PEPFAR, the George W. Bush Institute, the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), and Merck – [provided US\\$ 30.6 million in funding](#) for cervical cancer screening of women living with HIV.

^{ix} Policy Cures Research (2020). [Sexual and Reproductive Health Research and Development: Understanding the Spectrum](#). Published August 13, 2020. In 2018, the U.S. NIH provided US\$ 21 million for research and development toward new cervical cancer prevention tools.

^x United States Agency for International Development (2019). [USAID Announces \\$12 Million for the Prevention of Cervical Cancer in Sub-Saharan Africa](#). Accessed December 9, 2020.

^{xi} UNICEF (2020). “[Interruption of vaccination programs, and strategies to close the immunity gap](#).” Presentation to HPV Prevention and Control Board Technical Meeting, November 12, 2020.

^{xii} World Health Organization. “[WHO and UNICEF warn of a decline in vaccinations during COVID-19](#).” July 15, 2020.

^{xiii} Cancer Control NSW (2020). “[Modelled impact of delays in elimination scale-up on cervical cancer deaths averted for 78 LMICs](#).” Presentation to HPV Prevention and Control Board Technical Meeting, November 12, 2020.

^{xiv} World Health Organization (2020). "[Closing Immunization Gaps Caused by COVID](#)." Draft presentation, August 11, 2020.

^{xv} Integration Community of Practice (2020). [Global Call to Action for the Provision of Rights-Based, Client-centered Sexual and Reproductive Health During and After COVID-19](#). December 1, 2020.