



2019 YEAR IN REVIEW

January 2020

Dear supporters,

TogetHER for Health, launched in 2017, works tirelessly to build awareness of the global burden of cervical cancer, and to marshal broad support for elimination of the disease. We are energized to work alongside organizations that have been on the front lines of cervical cancer prevention for years, as well as those that are poised to bring new resources to the fight.

2020 is going to be a crucial year in the fight against cervical cancer, and TogetHER for Health is prepared to take full advantage of this hopeful moment.

This year, the World Health Organization's (WHO) member states will launch a global cervical cancer elimination strategy. The strategy will turn an achievable dream into a reality: the elimination of a cancer that currently kills an estimated 311,000 women per year and will kill up to an estimated 500,000 per women by 2030 if left unchecked.

TogetHER builds support and knowledge among the advocates, health workers, government officials, and others who are needed to make this strategy succeed. Our work in 2019, outlined below, has set the stage for a history-making push against the disease. We are eager to start seeing the number of deaths decline toward zero. Read on to learn how we contribute to the global elimination effort.



Reinforcing expertise

The global community has the diagnostics, treatments, vaccines, and equipment to effectively and efficiently prevent cervical cancer, and there is a pipeline of innovations that will enhance prevention efforts further. What has been lacking is access: donors and governments have not prioritized equipping providers with these tools, and training providers to use them. As a consequence, women have failed to access cervical cancer prevention services, and died without even knowing they exist, in many cases.

One way that TogetHER works to increase access is by sharing developments on key technical issues related to cervical cancer prevention, and highlighting best implementation practices. In 2019, with our organizational partners as co-hosts, we offered free webinars to expand access to the latest information on cervical cancer prevention science and implementation. We were thrilled to see participation from around the world; many attendees were practitioners who rarely get to travel to international conferences or have access to continuing education. Government representatives, implementers (international and community-based), donors, and advocates participated in our webinars to learn about:

- [Automated Visual Evaluation \(AVE\) of cervical images](#) to detect cancer and precancer
- [Thermal ablation](#) as a tool for treating precancerous lesions
- [Vaccination against HPV](#), the virus that causes almost all cases of cervical cancer
- [The integration of family planning services with cervical cancer prevention](#)

TogetHER also published [case studies](#) that illustrate the value of prioritizing cervical cancer prevention programs in a variety of settings. Our first two cases studies described



Executive Director Celina Schocken highlighted cervical cancer opportunities to global health leaders, implementers, and activists at the Women Deliver conference.

how a [hospital in Ghana is enabling broader access to cervical cancer services](#) by training providers, and how an [international NGO is preventing cervical cancer among women living with HIV in Zambia](#). With these case studies, TogetHER demonstrates to policymakers and health service delivery organizations that effective cervical cancer prevention programs can be implemented in even the most challenging healthcare environments around the world, thanks to dedicated practitioners and strong partnerships.



Building an evidence base and supporting innovation

TogetHER seeks to build confidence among decision-makers that their investments in cervical cancer prevention will bear fruit. To expand access and generate evidence on the value of prevention technologies in low- and middle-income countries, we launched a [Cervical Cancer Grants Program](#) in 2019.

We selected our [first two grantees in July of 2019](#) from a competitive field of 26 applications, representing 20 countries:

- **Jhpiego** is exploring the feasibility and acceptability of thermal ablation as a cervical precancer treatment strategy at four high-volume health facilities in Gaborone, aiming to inform implementation of thermal ablation more widely across Botswana.
- **The MoviCancer Foundation** is evaluating thermal ablation's impact on cervical precancer treatment as well

as its feasibility and acceptability among providers and clients in three regions of Nicaragua, while supporting the development of a national protocol for the use of thermal ablation and activities to accelerate its use across the country.



Enabling service delivery

The grants program is one way that TogetHER puts cervical cancer tools into the hands of health care providers. But as a nimble organization with a network extending around the globe, we can also respond quickly when we see a clear need for small-scale support.

In early 2019, we met a nurse named Comfort Asoogo, whose team at the Mctoone Cancer Care Foundation in Kumasi, Ghana had been struggling with cryotherapy to treat cervical precancer. In low-resource settings, it can be difficult to ensure an uninterrupted supply of gas, and the canisters are very heavy, so they are hard to transport. Purchasing the gas is expensive, adding to the cost of treatment, and the machines break down frequently. [TogetHER secured support to procure a new thermal ablation machine for her clinic](#), and arranged for Comfort's team members to receive training from the University of Ghana on how to use it. Comfort reported back to us that the machine was serving her team well. "Everything worked perfectly, the machine is working



Left: Trainees from the Cervical Cancer Prevention and Training Centre at Catholic Hospital, Battor, Ghana, prepare to screen for women cervical precancer at a health facility in Fakpoe. *Right:* Jagwati is a community health worker in a village in northern India. She educates women about how to protect themselves from cervical cancer and mobilizes them to seek screening and treatment services.

very well. We screened 157 women today,” she told us after an outreach clinic in November. They treated seven of them for precancerous lesions using thermal ablation.

TogetHER also supported programs that requested more information about HPV vaccine, prevention and treatment technologies. Technical support was provided in Kenya, India, Botswana, Ghana, and Malawi.



Tracking global developments

TogetHER tracks progress in access to better cervical cancer prevention tools globally, and we’re seeing improvements, although there are areas for concern. We keep our partners up to date on the evolving landscape, and our advocacy and education always reflect the latest developments.

In 2019, we applauded countries including Kenya, Uzbekistan, Cote d’Ivoire, Liberia, and The Gambia for adding the HPV vaccine to their national immunization programs, but the dramatically increased global demand for HPV vaccine over the last few years has led to severe and very worrying supply shortages that particularly impact low- and middle-income countries. We advocate for vaccine manufacturers to increase their capacity.

The science and technology to prevent and treat cervical cancer are advancing, and we were pleased to see modest funding increases in 2019. Unitaaid signed its first two cervical cancer grants, which focus on scale-up and new technology introduction. USAID also began new prevention programs in Malawi and Mozambique that link cervical cancer prevention with family planning. PEPFAR published results showing an impressive scale-up of prevention activities, and we also saw an increase in Global Fund programming.

TogetHER heralded the World Health Organization’s publication in October 2019 of [new guidelines on thermal ablation](#) for treating precancerous lesions. We anticipate that this will increase access to cervical cancer prevention as countries update their screen-and-treat policies to incorporate



FP2020 Executive Director Beth Schlachter made the case for linking cervical cancer and family planning services at an event organized by TogetHER and partners.

thermal ablation, and were very pleased to see many countries procure thermal ablation devices in response to the guidelines.

Easier-to-use, lower-cost HPV testing options are being piloted in several countries, but TogetHER is pushing countries to go beyond small-scale pilot programs and take this technology to scale.

Finally, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) announced a new treatment initiative with the Islamic Development Bank and other partners, aimed at increasing access to treatment for invasive women’s cancers. This partnership is a critical development, as there is such limited funding available for cancer treatment, and the needs are great.



Offering inspiration and raising awareness

The global health community is constantly pulled in many directions at once. TogetHER understands that there are a large number of health issues that demand attention, and we work hard to demonstrate that cervical cancer is a problem that can be addressed.



Dr. Princess Nothemba (Nono) Simelela, Special Adviser to the WHO Director-General for cervical cancer, engaged civil society on WHO's cervical cancer elimination strategy in development, hosted by TogetHER and Pathfinder.



Her Excellency Mrs. Sika Bella Kaboré, First Lady of Burkina Faso, called cancer a public health emergency during a United Nations General Assembly event hosted by the American Cancer Society, TogetHER, and other partners.

We organize and attend events where experts can learn and take inspiration from each other. For example, in May, our Executive Director Celina Schocken chaired a panel of global experts at a World Health Assembly side event that focused on scaling up prevention programs, and the role of civil society. Celina was also among the civil society experts who helped [prepare representatives from various U.S. Government departments for World Health Assembly participation](#).

In July, TogetHER and our partner Pathfinder International hosted a meeting in Washington, DC with Dr. Princess Nothemba (Nono) Simelela, Special Adviser to the WHO Director-General for cervical cancer. Dr. Nono provided an update on the cervical cancer elimination strategy to be considered at next year's World Health Assembly, and discussed ways that civil society can work with WHO to build support for the strategy.

Cervical cancer wasn't on the main stage at the United Nations General Assembly in September, but we perceived a need among advocates to convene around the issue. With the American Cancer Society and others, we planned an event that quickly reached capacity, and participants heard from a variety of champions and experts. Her Excellency Mrs. Sika

Bella Kaboré, First Lady of Burkina Faso, called cancer a public health emergency, and expressed the need for support for an HPV vaccination campaign in her country. Her Royal Highness Princess Dina Mired of Jordan, President of the Board of UICC, and Hon. Marisol Touraine, Chair of the Unitaid Board, offered inspirational remarks about innovation and scaling up cervical cancer screening and treatment globally. Other presenters from WHO, UNAIDS, ministries of health in Botswana and Zambia, and Pathfinder all discussed cervical cancer elimination in the context of the larger goals of Universal Health Coverage (UHC) and "Health for All."

In addition to events throughout the year, another source of inspiration from TogetHER is our ["Faces of Hope" series of stories](#) about women and communities affected by cervical cancer, and the health care providers, advocates, and policymakers that fight the disease. After last year's publication of stories from Kenya, this year we worked with the American Cancer Society on five stories from India, to be published in 2020, that focus on HPV vaccination, the role of community health workers and doctors, and the patient experience. Anyone may use our Faces of Hope photos, stories, and videos for cervical cancer advocacy and education.

We exposed the alarming shortfall in funding for cervical cancer prevention programs when we published a [report this year on the global state of funding](#) for screening, treatment of precancerous lesions, and vaccination against human papillomavirus (HPV), which causes most cases of cervical cancer. Our research—the first of its kind in this field—showed that the \$US 45.9 million for HPV vaccination and \$20.4 million for cervical cancer screening and treatment in 2018 in low-income and lower middle-income countries was grossly insufficient to support global elimination efforts. This snapshot of current resources included recommendations to funders, governments in low- and middle-income countries, vaccine suppliers, implementing organizations, and others for meeting the global need for cervical cancer prevention resources.

TogetHER designed the “Faces of Hope” stories and global funding report to be powerful advocacy tools that will support implementation of the forthcoming cervical cancer elimination strategy.



Promoting linkages

To achieve cervical cancer elimination, the international health community must view women's health holistically. We must consider how best to offer multiple health services to women, based on their needs and desires, and we must shape national policies, guidelines, and programs accordingly. TogetHER's focus on linking cervical cancer with other health services extends across the fields of family planning; HIV and AIDS; maternal, adolescent, and child health; and non-communicable diseases.

In November, we seized the moment in advance of a large-scale convening of global health experts for the 25th anniversary of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD). TogetHER saw a need, in the lead-up to the ICPD+25 conference, to highlight that too often, women receive reproductive health care only to lose their

lives a few years later to cervical cancer. We partnered with FP2020, Jhpiego, PATH, Pathfinder, and Population Services International (PSI) to organize a discussion in Washington, DC on accelerating the integration of cervical cancer prevention and family planning services. Health program implementers presented evidence that integration can increase the uptake of both cervical cancer prevention services and family planning, and described plans to expand the offerings of adolescent health services within HPV vaccination programs.

The Women Deliver conference, held every three years, is centered around gender equality and the health, rights, and wellbeing of girls and women. We were thrilled to see [cervical cancer gain prominence at Women Deliver 2019](#). TogetHER and our partners launched a cervical cancer “guerrilla campaign” using a slogan, “Women Deliver? Not Without a Cervix”, that prompted formal and informal discussions about cervical cancer. We drove attendance to key conference events to discuss the cervical cancer response, including our own side event, “Not Without a Cervix: Advocating for an Effective Cervical Cancer Response”, where senior global health leaders, implementers, and activists strategized on increasing attention to cervical cancer prevention.

UNAIDS appointed a new Executive Director in August, and [TogetHER and our partners sent a letter congratulating Winnie Byanyima and urging her to include cervical cancer prevention among the priorities for her tenure](#). We offered recommendations that build on UNAIDS' experience working with women living with HIV, who are particularly vulnerable to cervical cancer, and need increased access to screening and treatment.

Ms. Byanyima sent us a very positive response less than 24 hours after receiving our letter. In her response, she recognized the importance of integrating HIV and cervical cancer services, and shared our interest in working together on these linked issues. “We need to do much more to ensure all women can access screening and treatment” for cervical cancer, she stated. We will continue to work with UNAIDS to promote HIV and cervical cancer integration.



Building a coalition

It's no coincidence that our name is TogetHER. The activities described above highlight that we see our work as a collaborative effort. Our goal is to bring experts and advocates together to tackle cervical cancer elimination, and serve as a trusted voice on the issue.

In 2019, deeply respected global health organizations PATH and FHI 360 became our newest [partners](#), joining the American Cancer Society, Basic Health International (BHI), Global Good, Jhpiego, Pathfinder, Population Services International (PSI), and Project Concern International (PCI). These high-impact organizations work with us to increase cervical cancer awareness and resources.

In addition to the members of TogetHER, we would like to thank our supporters, including the Bristol-Myers Squibb Foundation and the Women to Watch Foundation.



Sangeeta is a survivor of cervical cancer who shares her story in an effort to end stigma around the disease and to ensure women access prevention services, including HPV vaccination or screening.

TogetHER Partners



TogetHER Funders

- Bristol-Myers Squibb Foundation
- Vizas Family Philanthropy Fund
- Women to Watch Foundation

Event Sponsors

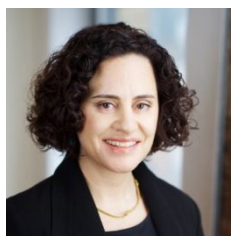
- American Cancer Society
- Cepheid
- FP2020
- Jhpiego
- Pathfinder International
- PATH
- Population Services International (PSI)

Thank you for supporting TogetHER in our second year.

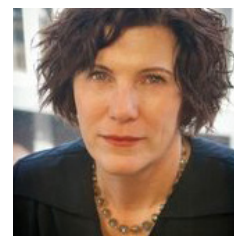
We're a small organization that thinks big, and we are ready for the anticipated launch of the global cervical cancer elimination strategy this year. Our unique role alongside many effective service delivery organizations is:

- **Advocacy** around the need for cervical cancer programs—linked with HIV, reproductive health, and non-communicable disease programs—and adoption of effective new technologies
- **Coordination** of partners so that our voices are amplified
- **Raising awareness** so that women demand and access high-quality services, and funders are motivated to join this movement to prevent cervical cancer deaths

We will continue to push the field forward. We do it because no woman should die of this completely preventable disease.



Celina Schocken
Executive Director



Kathy Vizas
Board Chair



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TogetHER is fiscally sponsored by Panorama Global, a 501(c)(3), non-profit organization.

Cover photos (clockwise from top left):

Health workers found precancerous lesions when they screened Lakshmi for cervical cancer in her village in India. She was successfully treated. Ms. Eugenia Mensah is a midwife who started creating awareness of cervical cancer in the village of Navrongo, in the Upper East Region of Ghana, after receiving training at the Cervical Cancer Prevention and Training Centre at Catholic Hospital, Battor. Dr. Neerja Bhatla (2nd from left) has been working for over two decades to prevent cervical cancer among Indian women.