

Pooled Procurement to Expand Access to Cervical Cancer Screening in Low- and Middle-Income Countries

Executive Summary

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Cervical cancer elimination is an achievable global health goal that hinges on getting women access to proven prevention interventions: HPV vaccination, high-performance screening, and timely treatment. But access itself depends heavily on the affordability and the availability of these interventions in a region.

Cervical cancer elimination efforts have greatly benefited from the pooled procurement of HPV vaccines by UNICEF on behalf of Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, reducing vaccine prices to a fraction of those in high-income countries and ensuring their widespread global introduction and distribution. Such investments in preventive vaccines will protect today's young women from cervical cancer and other HPV-related cancers decades from now. But it's just as critical to ensure that adult women today have access to lifesaving screening giving those at highest risk a pathway to necessary care.

Molecular diagnostics for HPV have proven to be far more accurate than more widespread visual methods such as cytology and visual inspection with acetic acid, while also requiring less frequent screening and reducing the burden on health practitioners, especially when deployed through self-testing. However, this newer technology has seen slow uptake in low-resource settings, in part due to the high need for investment in testing platforms and the relatively high price of individual tests.

Pooled procurement mechanisms such as those utilized by the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria and the United States President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief have been essential to negotiating reduced prices and expanding the supply of global health commodities on behalf of low- and middle-income countries, saving millions of lives around the world. Regional pools – including the Revolving Fund and Strategic Fund coordinated by the Pan American Health Organization and the nascent mechanism recently announced by the Africa Centres for Disease

Control and Prevention – seek to take advantage of geographic solidarity to create leverage for price and supply negotiations.

To understand how pooled procurement might be leveraged to reduce the cost of HPV tests in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs), TogetHER for Health undertook a formative research project combining desk research with interviews of 20 stakeholders representing HPV diagnostics manufacturers, cervical cancer program implementers, and organizations specializing in global health procurement.

Across sectors, stakeholders raised the substantial benefit of lower per-unit costs in expanding the health impact of programs limited by budget constraints. This increased access for LMICs was consistently cited as the key driver of the implementation of pooled procurement.

Suppliers highlighted the point that large, reliable volume commitments support internal decisions to lower per-unit costs. Implementers commented on pooled procurement's ability to address market failures and ease fragmentation in terms of access while also simplifying negotiations and reducing the number of intermediaries. Consolidated funding was also seen as encouraging health competition by incentivizing the entry of new suppliers.

Stakeholders highlighted a number of conditions that must be considered in the application of pooled procurement mechanisms for health based on their experiences:

- The critical need for sustainable, predictable funding to incentivize suppliers to commit volumes of health commodities and, in turn, to negotiate price reductions.
- The importance of reliable demand forecasting to inform the development of a pooled procurement mechanism and planned rollout of supplies, taking into account pre-existing health system capacity.

Selected Conditions of Successful Pooled Procurement of Global Health Commodities

Condition	Importance for Stakeholder Categories		
	Suppliers	Procurement Organizations	Implementers
Sufficient longer-term funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Incentivizes participation in mechanism 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leverage for negotiations with suppliers Incentivizes entry of new suppliers and innovation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Supports predictable programming and consistent supply
Reliable demand forecasting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides assurance of market 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Supports country decision-making/planning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clearer understanding of community needs
Shared product standards across stakeholders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduces barriers to markets 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Speeds uptake of health interventions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Speeds access at community level

- Policy and regulatory issues, including World Health Organization prequalification, national and regional regulatory approval process, and trade policies.
- Logistical factors around inventory management and storage capacity.
- The financial and logistical cost of establishing a new mechanism, which can be quite high and bears significant risk.
- Increased access to HPV testing must be coupled with commensurate access to treatment interventions.

This research supports a number of considerations going forward:

- In the current landscape, necessary conditions for a successful pooled procurement mechanism for HPV testing - including demand and market forecasting for HPV diagnostics, predictable and sustainable funding sources, and expanded efforts to raise awareness - are not broadly in place.
- Exploring the wider inclusion of HPV diagnostics in existing mechanisms is warranted, as opposed to establishing a new mechanism specific to HPV testing.
- Increased engagement of donors and more effective

promotion of existing funding streams for cervical cancer prevention – such as the Global Fund – is critical to supporting wider scale-up of HPV testing in the near term.

- National cervical cancer elimination plans must be budgeted and have the flexibility to incorporate new screening methodologies.
- Continuing to build awareness of cervical cancer and effective prevention strategies through community-based organizations, health workers, schools, and trusted leaders can generate critical demand driving country-level action when aggregated at the national level.

TogetherHER for Health and our partners are working to generate awareness and spark meaningful dialogue towards making HPV tests more widely affordable and accessible. We are indebted to the stakeholders who provided their time and perspectives to generate this piece, and to the reviewers who added essential insight and guidance. We look forward to supporting decisive action to broaden access to high performance screening for women around the world.

TogetherHER for Health is a global partnership igniting the movement to end cervical cancer everywhere around the world by driving awareness, supporting catalytic programs, and fighting for the political and financial resources needed to end this preventable disease.