

Accelerating Vietnam's Journey Toward Cervical Cancer Elimination: Lessons and Leadership from the APAC Region



Cervical cancer, a largely preventable and treatable disease caused by persistent infection with high-risk types of human papillomavirus (HPV), continues to impose a significant health and economic burden globally, with a disproportionate impact on low- and middle-income countries (LMICs). The global burden of disease is heavily weighted towards Asia, which currently accounts for approximately 60% of new cases and 57% of worldwide cervical cancer deaths, respectively.¹

While several regional neighbors like Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, and the Philippines have developed national elimination strategies aligned with global targets, Vietnam remains one of the few countries without a comprehensive, funded elimination strategy.² Without immediate action, Vietnam's cervical cancer incidence is predicted to increase by 22% and mortality by 32% by 2030, resulting in thousands of preventable deaths.¹

In August 2025, the APAC Women's Cancer Coalition with member, TogetHER for Health, undertook the development of a white paper to examine Vietnam's progress to date on cervical cancer prevention and control. Drawing on case studies from six focal countries across the APAC/ASEAN region, the report offers actionable recommendations for an accelerated national response from Vietnam towards the development of a national cervical cancer elimination strategy.

The Economic Argument for Investment in Cervical Cancer Elimination

Investing in cervical cancer elimination is a sound economic decision for Vietnam. Global models indicate that every \$1 USD invested in elimination efforts yields at least \$3.20 USD in economic returns due to increased female workforce participation, with broader socioeconomic returns potentially exceeding \$26 per dollar invested.² More specifically for Vietnam, a national return on investment (ROI) study found that by aligning coverage of HPV vaccination and cervical screening in line with the World Health Organization's (WHO) elimination

targets could yield economic returns in Vietnam of \$5-\$11 USD and combined economic and social benefits of \$8-\$20 USD for every \$1 USD invested.³ Conversely, inaction leads to substantial economic losses from high treatment costs for late-stage cancer, lost productivity, and catastrophic out-of-pocket expenditures for families, pushing them into poverty.

Prioritizing prevention through HPV vaccination and screening with high-performance tests, coupled with early treatment, has been demonstrated as among the most cost-effective public health interventions available across diverse settings, globally and in the ASEAN region.^{4, 5, 6, 7}

Vietnamese policymakers and government leadership can make a strategic and urgent shift towards prioritizing comprehensive cervical cancer prevention efforts, with the ultimate aim of elimination.

Major Findings and The Call for Urgency in Vietnam

Vietnam has made consistent progress in cervical cancer control and prevention since the first national cancer control plan was launched in 2008, but the lack of a national cervical cancer elimination strategy represents a critical policy gap – and opportunity – in protecting women's health. **Current HPV vaccination coverage in Vietnam is estimated at 12.5% of females 15-29 years, and participation in cervical cancer screening rates are 30% of eligible women in the past five years**, primarily through opportunistic efforts that largely rely on Papanicolaou (Pap) tests or visual inspection.^{8,9} With an approximate female population of 51.74 million in 2025, modeling estimates project roughly 3,500 new cases and 1,900 deaths in 2025.¹⁰

Vietnam has yet to implement an organized, population-based national cervical cancer screening program, and access to cervical screening with high performance tests within the public health system remains limited. Furthermore, unlike regional peers such as Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, and the Philippines - all of which have

established or are imminently rolling out national cervical cancer elimination strategies - Vietnam currently lacks a comprehensive, fully costed, and politically endorsed roadmap aligned with the WHO's global cervical cancer elimination plan and corresponding '90-70-90' targets. Without this foundational strategy, systematic planning, resource allocation, and coordinated implementation remain impossible.

Countries like Australia are on the verge of eliminating cervical cancer due to sustained investment in high HPV vaccination coverage, a transition to primary HPV screening with self-collection options, and robust treatment pathways, all underpinned by a national elimination strategy. Other nations like Thailand - through its Universal Coverage Scheme integrating HPV testing - and Malaysia are also demonstrating significant progress. These regional successes highlight that cervical cancer elimination in the region is achievable with strategic planning, political will, and sustained investment.

Key Recommendations for Accelerated Action on Cervical Cancer in Vietnam

The report puts forth a series of time-bound, actionable recommendations for Vietnam, centered around a multi-pronged strategy:

- **Develop and Implement a Comprehensive, Costed National Cervical Cancer Elimination Strategy (2025-2026):** Finalize and adopt a comprehensive National Cervical Cancer Elimination Strategy and Operational Plan aligned with WHO's 90-70-90 targets. This includes detailed plans for scaling up HPV vaccination, implementing population-based HPV testing, ensuring access to treatment, and strengthening health systems.
- **Secure Sustainable Financing (2026-2027):** Mobilize domestic resources, including Social Health Insurance (SHI) funds and dedicated government budgets, and

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explore catalytic external funding and innovative financing mechanisms to ensure the long-term sustainability of the national elimination program.

- **Roll Out Population-Based HPV Screening (2026-2030):** Initiate a phased national rollout of population-based cervical cancer screening using primary HPV testing, ideally with HPV self-collection options, aiming for at least 50% coverage of the eligible primary target cohort by 2030. Ensure these services are integrated into the national SHI benefit package.
- **Roll Out and Scale HPV Vaccination (2026-2030):** Successfully launch and rapidly scale the HPV vaccination program within the national Expanded Program on Immunization (EPI), aiming for at least 70% coverage of the primary target cohort (girls 9-14 years) by 2030, leveraging school-based delivery and robust community engagement.
- **Strengthen Health System Capacity (ongoing):** Invest in workforce training, especially in HPV testing, colposcopy, and treatment, and establish robust national screening and cancer registries that support disease surveillance, improve referral pathways, and ensure health facility readiness.
- **Enhance Public Awareness and Engagement (ongoing):** Launch sustained national education campaigns to increase knowledge, address misinformation, reduce stigma, and drive demand for vaccination and screening services, actively involving communities and patient organizations.

Vietnam can make significant strides towards eliminating cervical cancer as a public health problem, saving thousands of lives, reducing economic hardship, and building a healthier future for women and girls. The time for decisive action is now.

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