

COVID-19 Respiratory Care Response Coordination project



Access to oxygen—critical to respiratory care

COVID-19 is an acute respiratory tract disease caused by infection with the SARS-CoV-2 virus. While most people with COVID-19 develop only mild or moderate disease, approximately 20 percent develop severe or critical disease that requires oxygen therapy to support breathing.

In many health facilities across low- and middle-income countries, oxygen therapy—including diagnosis, generation, and delivery equipment—is not reliably available. The biggest barriers to oxygen therapy access include supply, human resources, funding constraints, and the inability to deploy resources in countries rapidly in a way that ensures maximum impact while not overwhelming existing health care systems.

Many of the tools and capabilities needed to overcome these barriers already exist across different global health and implementing organizations, manufacturers and suppliers, and country governments. To ensure that those who need respiratory care support due to COVID-19, or beyond, receive it, immediate steps are necessary to coordinate the global response that prioritizes reliable access to oxygen.



Oxygen medical gas is available to health facilities in multiple formats, including cylinders, concentrators, and central pipeline systems. Photo: PATH/Zachary Clemence.

COVID-19 Respiratory Care Response Coordination project

PATH, together with a consortium of partners and with support from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, is leading the COVID-19 Respiratory Care Response Coordination project to support country decision-makers in the development and execution of a comprehensive respiratory care plan to meet the demands of COVID-19. The project will also pursue strategies to help prioritize and improve access to oxygen therapy and other essential equipment involved in respiratory care as an integral part of health systems strengthening, beyond the pandemic response.

Project snapshot

Goal: Support targeted low- and middle-income countries in improving reliable access to a comprehensive respiratory care treatment package—both as part of the immediate COVID-19 response and to strengthen respiratory care systems in the long run.

Key objectives:

- Global respiratory care response coordination.
- Rapid respiratory care capacity assessments.
- Supplier landscaping and outreach.
- Support of informed country-specific decision-making on procurement and use of respiratory care products.

Partners: Clinton Health Access Initiative, the Every Breath Counts Coalition

Focus countries*: Cambodia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, India, Kenya, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Liberia, Malawi, Nigeria, Senegal, Vietnam, Zambia

Duration: May 2020—October 2021

Key objectives and activities

Global respiratory care response coordination

Project partners will pursue integrated strategies to support country-level access, understanding, and implementation of global guidelines for the COVID-19 response.

Immediate activities include:

- Establishment of effective mechanisms for stakeholder coordination, advocacy and communications, and better access to technical country resources for COVID-19 response. This work includes weekly open COVID-19 partner calls (reach out to oxygen@path.org to join), as well as the development and dissemination of various [advocacy and technical resources to increase awareness around oxygen access issues](#).
- Development and dissemination of a [central library of resources for COVID-19 response and long-term respiratory care planning](#).
- Development of a road map for global respiratory care financing architecture that outlines long-term market considerations essential to sustaining improvements to oxygen access.

Rapid respiratory care capacity assessments

Ensuring access to respiratory care for COVID-19 is more complex than just supplying oxygen and other respiratory equipment. Supplies of this essential equipment are limited. To ensure equitable access, the current availability of equipment within countries will be gathered and compared to the forecasted need for equipment. The gap between current availability and estimated need informs the procurement and distribution of equipment.

Immediate activities include:

- Biomedical equipment survey.
- Rapid demand quantification.

Supplier landscaping and outreach

Outreach to suppliers to understand existing inventory, available manufacturing capacity, and current pricing can facilitate effective supply and demand matching. The project will connect with manufacturers and other global partners to pool available intelligence on capacity and lead times for equipment that is essential to respiratory care in the COVID-19 response. This will be done in collaboration with the key global coordinating bodies and procurers to assist with rapid supplier engagement and market landscaping, analytics, and other related support.

Immediate activities include:

- Landscaping of supply networks in sub-Saharan Africa through secondary research and direct outreach to firms.
- Centralized procurement and distribution support via global,

regional, and national mechanisms.

- Mapping of bulk supplies of oxygen to assess national and regional capacities.
- Surveying of global and regional procurement mechanisms to improve transparency and clarity among buyers faced with many potential purchasing options.

Country-specific decision-making support

Leveraging existing partnerships with governments and key stakeholders in low- and middle-income countries, the project consortium will provide technical assistance to key decision-makers as they work to meet the emergent need for respiratory support resulting from COVID-19 infections. Activities will help with information sharing, procurement, contract negotiation, supplier engagement, training, and maintenance support for respiratory care equipment. The project will assist ministry partners to operationalize COVID-19 response plans, beginning with help navigating the processes to access relief funding.

Immediate activities include:

- Procurement coordination.
- Ordering and inventory management for consumables.
- Training in appropriate oxygen use.
- Equipment management support.

Beyond these immediate activities, the project partners pursue various strategies aimed at long-term respiratory care support.

Additional resources

Project resources: <https://www.path.org/programs/market-dynamics/covid-19-and-oxygen-resource-library/>.

The Every Breath Counts coalition: <https://stoppneumonia.org/every-breath-counts/>.

CHAI's oxygen therapy program: <https://www.clintonhealthaccess.org/our-programs/oxygen/>

For questions or additional information: oxygen@path.org.

* This project will be carried out in close coordination with separate initiatives led by Clinton Health Access Initiative, PATH, and other partners in additional countries, including Bangladesh, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Guinea, Indonesia, Lesotho, Niger, Mali, Myanmar, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, and Zimbabwe.

Reference: World Health Organization. *COVID-19 Clinical management: living guidance*. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2021. Available at <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/WHO-2019-nCoV-clinical-2021-1>



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PATH is a global organization that works to eliminate health inequities by bringing together institutions, businesses, investors, and individuals to solve the world's most pressing health challenges. With expertise in science, market development, technology, advocacy, and dozens of other specialties, PATH develops and scales solutions—including vaccines, drugs, devices, diagnostics, and innovative approaches to strengthening health systems worldwide.

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