



**A PARTNERSHIP THAT IS
GOING FURTHER FOR WOMEN**

INTRODUCTION

Go Further is committed to creating a healthier future for women with an aim to reduce new cervical cancer cases by 95 percent among women living with HIV (WLHIV). Launched in May 2018, Go Further is an innovative public-private partnership between the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), the George W. Bush Institute, the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), and Merck.

Go Further invests in partner countries to integrate and scale up cervical cancer screening and treatment services within existing platforms for HIV care and women's health. The mission of this partnership is driven by the thousands of mothers, sisters, and daughters who bravely confront HIV and cervical cancer diagnoses every day.



The COVID-19 pandemic has changed the global health landscape, and the Go Further partnership applauds the implementers and governments who are responding courageously. As PEPFAR navigates the changing context and provides guidance on the way forward¹, Go Further acknowledges the importance of early cervical cancer screening and linkage to treatment, when necessary, and remains committed to ensuring this important work continues.

Go Further began working in eight countries with a high burden of HIV and cervical cancer (Botswana, Eswatini, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Zambia, and Zimbabwe) to support the screening of and treatment for precancerous lesions. In fiscal year (FY) 2021, Go Further is expanding services to four additional countries (Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda). PEPFAR has so far committed \$93 million to the partnership through FY2021.

- An initial \$30.6 million was budgeted for in FY19;
- \$22.9 million was budgeted for FY20; and
- \$39.6 million was budgeted for FY21, including expansion of services to four additional countries.

1 <https://www.state.gov/pepfar/coronavirus/>

BACKGROUND

Since 2011, with leadership from the Bush Institute, PEPFAR, and UNAIDS, global partners have been working together to catalyze action and investments for cervical cancer prevention and control across the continuum of care, from education and raising awareness to advanced treatment and palliative care. Great strides were made to establish screening and treatment services, garner attention and resources for cervical cancer in sub-Saharan Africa, and develop policies and tools to support national cervical cancer control programs. Go Further emerged as a result of a strategic review, led by the Bush Institute and PEPFAR, which highlighted the opportunity to scale up these efforts, especially for the women with the greatest likelihood of developing cervical cancer, namely WLHIV.

Given this enhanced focus on WLHIV, the partnership was restructured so that all funding, implementation, and program oversight would be directed through the PEPFAR platform that supports a comprehensive HIV/AIDS response in countries where PEPFAR operates. This shift allows the partnership to more easily reach women with the greatest risk of developing cervical cancer – WLHIV – by meeting them where they are already accessing care. Through integration of services, scaling within existing health systems and structures, and aligning programmatic oversight and evaluation, Go Further is rapidly seeing the success of its strategic shift come to life through the hundreds of thousands of women served so far.

GO FURTHER PARTNERSHIP

Go Further partners work together with government leaders, community stakeholders, and the pharmaceutical industry to provide a comprehensive approach to cervical cancer control. Each partner brings unique areas of expertise to strengthen the collaborative efforts. By working together, the partners go further than on their own. PEPFAR leads the implementation, monitoring, and oversight of the partnership. The Bush Institute leverages its convening powers, educational efforts, and leadership to help ensure high-level commitment and to raise the profile of cervical cancer in the global arena. UNAIDS shares data collected on the policy integration indicators and assists with formulating recommendations for country governments and partners. It engages civil society and communities in service demand creation, establishing/scaling up good referral systems and continuum of care, and accountability. UNAIDS also coordinates with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to scale up radiotherapy options for women diagnosed with cervical cancer with particular focus on those living with HIV. Merck provides an already-proven effective human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine to a new study to determine its best use in women living with HIV.

WHY WE GO FURTHER

The United States has a history of being a compassionate nation – a tradition that continues through programs like PEPFAR, and partnerships like Go Further. When President Bush announced PEPFAR in 2003, he said, “Seldom has history offered a greater opportunity to do so much for so many.” Built on compassion, PEPFAR’s investments have saved over 18 million lives.²

2 https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/PEPFAR-Latest-Results_WAD_2019.pdf

Go Further countries have some of the highest rates of cervical cancer in the world. In the Go Further countries, incidence ranges from 18.9 to 73.2 per 100,000 women, regardless of HIV status. Comparing these rates to the U.S., they are up to 11 times higher.³

Concurrently, UNAIDS estimates there are 19.2 million WLHIV across the globe. The 12 countries where Go Further operates are home to one third, or 7.1 million, WLHIV. Additionally, women in these countries represent a disproportionate amount of new HIV infections in adults; in the Go Further countries, 58 percent of new HIV infections are in women.⁴



“My health is so important to my business in the sense that these are five employees who depend on me. I knew that if I stopped this business, these five families are going to suffer. So I needed to beat this cancer so that I could support these other families. They look up to me. I take them to be my family. I just needed to get better so that I could go back to work.”

**- Lydia Musonda,
Go Further beneficiary
from Zambia**

WLHIV have an increased chance of developing precancerous abnormalities and invasive cervical cancer.⁵ They also have poorer survival rates after cervical cancer diagnosis than women without HIV.⁶ WLHIV have vulnerable immune systems that increase the likelihood of persistent infection with HPV, which causes most cases of cervical cancer. While HPV is common in adults,⁷ WLHIV have a lower likelihood of clearing the infection, increasing the chances it will cause precancerous lesions or progress to invasive cancer.⁸

Additionally, cervical cancer affects women living with HIV at younger ages. Because WLHIV have a higher chance of being impacted by cervical cancer, and present at an earlier age, Go Further is working to reach these women. Go Further has documented cases of suspected cervical cancer in girls as young as 15 years old. Because of this early onset, Go Further targets screening for WLHIV between age 25 to 49 – or younger if allowable per country guidelines.

Women strengthen their families, build businesses, launch initiatives, and enrich their communities materially and socially. They are leaders and guides to their peers – models to emulate for the next generation. But illnesses such as cervical cancer can erect barriers for women pursuing their dreams, and too often cut short their lives. By addressing health concerns and eliminating those barriers, women can have a greater impact on their communities. The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that for every dollar invested in cervical cancer prevention and control, US\$3.20 will be returned to the economy.⁹

3 <https://gco.iarc.fr/today/online-analysis-table>

4 https://www.unaids.org/sites/default/files/media_asset/2020_aids-data-book_en.pdf

5 <https://europepmc.org/article/PMC/5854529>

6 <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/30194006>

7 <https://hpvcentre.net/statistics/reports/XFX.pdf>

8 <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.1002/ijc.28425>

9 http://apps.who.int/gb/ebwha/pdf_files/EB146/B146_9-en.pdf

On a broader level, women contribute to healthier societies and nations, especially where barriers to their participation in public life are reduced or removed entirely. They strengthen local governance and stability, advance their economies with more prospects for trade and investment with countries near and far, and provide resources for strategic engagement and diplomacy. One report found that where the U.S. has invested through PEPFAR, there has been accelerated economic growth, strengthened political stability, and better diplomatic relationships with the U.S.¹⁰

Knowing the risk cervical cancer poses to WLHIV, it is not only the right thing to do ethically and programmatically to provide services in this area, but it safeguards the investments PEPFAR has made across the region and furthers the prosperity and stability of countries where Go Further partners.

HOW WE GO FURTHER

Go Further prioritizes women with the highest likelihood of being impacted by cervical cancer, specifically WLHIV, for services. The program intentionally builds on the PEPFAR platform and meets women with cervical cancer services where they are already seeking care. Go Further integrates education, cervical cancer screening, and same-day treatment into HIV and women's health platforms to make it easier for women to access care for a range of needs.

Funding and guidelines for Go Further cover activities from education and awareness raising, screening, same-day treatment for precancerous lesions, Loop Electrosurgical Excision Procedure (LEEP) for more advanced precancerous lesions, and palliative therapy.¹¹ Go Further requires screening facilities to have same-day treatment services at the same location. There are rare exceptions for low-volume sites, which must have referral systems to link clients to treatment.

When women present with suspected cervical cancer, they are referred for additional evaluation and treatment at established sites, which were identified during initial planning processes for the introduction of Go Further activities.

In June 2019, Merck joined Go Further. Among Merck's contributions to Go Further are the provision of 9-valent HPV vaccine for use in a cohort of WLHIV in Eswatini through an exploratory study. The study will help determine appropriate dosage for WLHIV. The partnership is discussing how to increase vaccine access and availability beyond the study.



"I dream for a prosperous future for my children. I have to be productive so that they can get that help from me. I also have to be productive for my community to be a healthy community. With a healthy community, government has less of a job because we are able to cater for ourselves. With a healthier community, the government would be healthier too."

**- Jabulile Sithole,
Go Further beneficiary
from Eswatini**

¹⁰ <https://bipartisanpolicy.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Building-Prosperity-Stability-and-Security-Through-Strategic-Health-Diplomacy-A-Study-of-15-Years-of-PEPFAR.pdf>

¹¹ <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/COP20-Guidance.pdf>

Beyond the continuum of care, Go Further recognizes that cervical cancer continues to be stigmatized. Go Further works with members of the community to break through the stigma of diagnosis and reduce myths around the disease and the screening procedure itself. Moreover, the best information and most innovative thinking for integrating and delivering services come directly from the communities that are impacted by these issues. Community leadership is vital to achieving health outcomes.¹² Go Further listens to and works with the community, carefully considering feedback and input to improve outcomes and better reach women.

The leadership and ownership of national governments is critical to the scalability and sustainability of Go Further's efforts. Go Further collaborates closely with governments to strategize on ways to provide services for women from prevention through the cancer journey, including through fostering partnerships, dedicating national resources, and coordinating among multiple donors and stakeholders. Go Further relies on government leadership to create a policy environment that allows for the integration and implementation of services.

Go Further works across the continuum of cancer care, especially to provide services for WLHIV. While there has been tremendous progress on scaling up screening services, there is more work to do. Go Further seeks to strengthen the partnership to better serve women wherever they are in their healthcare journey.

NEXT STEPS TO GO FURTHER

There are areas where we still need to Go Further:

- Continuing to fight stigma, discrimination, and misinformation;
- Widening availability of and access to the HPV vaccine to reduce the likelihood that girls develop cervical cancer;
- Reaching all WLHIV, every other year, for screening services, so lesions can be more easily treated;
- Ensuring more women are linked from screening to treatment – both for precancerous lesions and for invasive cervical cancer;
- Expanding availability of advanced treatment
- Providing a supportive environment for women undergoing long-term treatment, including transportation, housing, and other support
- Helping women cope with their diagnosis through holistic, palliative care.

We need to improve coordination among all levels, from global organizations to civil society and community groups. As the global community works to prioritize integrated, quality healthcare access, we will need to form greater partnerships across organizations, including those working on non-communicable diseases, like cervical cancer, and infectious diseases, like HIV.

Going further for women also requires looking beyond the traditional continuum of care to recognize that broader determinants, including socioeconomic, political, and environmental factors, play a role. Go Further collaborates with initiatives like the PEPFAR-led DREAMS (Determined, Resilient, Empowered, AIDS-free, Mentored, and Safe) Partnership and the Bush Institute's First Ladies Initiative that are working to address underlying challenges for women and girls. Girls and young women are disproportionately affected by a host of factors that hinder their health as they grow up. Going further for women means considering the full life cycle of a woman, recognizing challenges she may face, but working to break down barriers and empowering her to meet these challenges head on.

¹² https://www.unaids.org/sites/default/files/media_asset/2019-global-AIDS-update_en.pdf