

At A Glance: Cervical Cancer Prevention

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Pathfinder envisions a world where no women of reproductive age suffer or die from cervical cancer or its complications.

Achieving this vision requires ensuring equitable access to prevention, early detection, and treatment services. Cervical cancer claims the lives of hundreds of thousands of women each year—and deaths are rising. The primary cause of cervical cancer is the human papillomavirus (HPV), which is passed during intercourse. In 2020, roughly 342,000 women died from cervical cancer (GLOBOCAN 2020). More than 85% of cervical cancer cases and deaths are in low-and middle-income countries because of limited access to preventive services (GLOBOCAN 2020). The burden is much higher in sub-Saharan Africa, where Pathfinder works.

Over the past decade, Pathfinder has been a key player in cervical cancer prevention (CCP) programs in various African countries. Our programs integrate CCP activities with HIV/AIDS treatment and care, maternal health, and sexual and reproductive health programs.



A health worker holds a technology used for cryotherapy—a treatment that prevents cervical cancer. Photo: Pathfinder Ethiopia

APPROACH

Pathfinder's approach to fighting cervical cancer includes a strategic mix of two prevention methods tailored to the local environment and needs of women, including those living with HIV.

Primary prevention reduces or eliminates exposure to cancer-causing factors by raising HPV vaccine public awareness, and promoting condoms, monogamy, or the delay of intercourse.

Secondary prevention checks for abnormal conditions when there are no symptoms before cancer develops, through screening and testing. Screening tests for cervical cancer include visual inspection with acetic acid (VIA), HPV DNA testing, and conventional or liquid-based cytology (Pap smear).

ACTIVITIES

The Single-Visit Approach (SVA) to cervical cancer prevention standardizes quality of care among health care providers and includes a visual inspection of the cervix with acetic acid wash and treatment of precancerous lesions with cryotherapy. Pathfinder developed a successful model for integrating SVA into HIV/AIDS care and treatment with support from The United States President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) through the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Advocacy efforts strengthen CCP awareness, promote favorable policies for women to access quality sexual and reproductive health services, and encourage country progress towards the World Health Organization 90-70-90 targets¹ to eliminate cervical cancer by 2030.

Innovative techniques and technologies have been critical to decreasing the burden of cervical cancer. Pathfinder expanded and supported the use of groundbreaking solutions such as thermal ablation to treat precancerous cervical lesions, and Mobile Optical Device Technology—MobileODT—to improve the quality of pre-cancer detection.

Partnering with governments ensures they take the lead in CCP program implementation, allowing for continuity of sustainable interventions at scale and beyond the life of Pathfinder programs.

Women-centered care creates a holistic and meaningful experience between health providers and women to improve sexual and reproductive health outcomes.

Promoting equity and inclusivity allows HIV-positive women, who are known to be at high risk of cervical cancer, to access quality care.

Evidence-based practice, learning, and knowledge management are integrated into CCP programming by supporting host countries with documenting and sharing best practices to ensure greater sustainability.

¹ 90% of girls fully vaccinated with HPV vaccine by age 15 years. 70% of women are screened with a high-performance test by 35 years of age and again by 45 years of age. 90% of women identified with cervical disease receive treatment (90% of women with precancer treated, and 90% of women with invasive cancer managed).

WHERE WE WORK

Ethiopia: Addis Tesfa (“New Hope” for Cervical Cancer Prevention)

In 2009, Pathfinder introduced the first CCP Single Visit Approach (SVA) program in Ethiopia through our Addis Tesfa project. The SVA model was successful and gained national recognition in Ethiopia. Pathfinder, working with the government and partners, trained health care providers in CCP, including SVA, and adapted training materials to ensure quality service, standardized training, and service delivery. Selected public hospitals were equipped to treat cervical cancer pre-cancerous lesions and designated 14 hospitals as a Centers of Excellence, serving as a teaching centers and model sites for sustainability and scale-up of CCP services. The project provided evidence-based information on the feasibility and cost-effectiveness of the SVA for CCP approach and partnered with Ethiopia’s Ministry of Health to take the program to scale nationally in 2015 through an initiative spearheaded by the then First lady of Ethiopia. Through Addis Tesfa and other projects, **45,898 women accessed the SVA service, and 91% of those who tested positive received appropriate CCP treatment.** Ethiopia’s cervical cancer prevention efforts were later adapted in four additional countries.

Multi-country, Sub-Saharan Africa: Regional Cervical Cancer Prevention

Pathfinder expanded CCP in sub-Saharan Africa by implementing a unique, multi-country CCP program in **Burundi, Mozambique, Nigeria, and Tanzania.** Pathfinder formed a CCP network—a system of country programs delivering critical prevention services, with Ethiopia serving as a hub for evidence generation and learning. Leveraging our experiences, Pathfinder continues to expand CCP services to other countries, including recently, Kenya, Burkina Faso, and Côte d’Ivoire.

Burundi: Pathfinding CCP Project

In 2016, Pathfinder established a cervical cancer referral pathway and introduced Burundi’s first SVA for CCP services. SVA was applied in two hospitals and Pathfinder helped to train a pool of national health providers to deliver quality CCP services. The program facilitated the screening of **1,300 women between 2016 and 2018.** Additional health care providers from Burundi were trained in Ethiopia with financial support from the World Bank and our Pathfinding fund.

Nigeria: Pathfinding CCP Project

Pathfinder supported the integration of CCP services with reproductive, maternal, newborn, and child health (RMNCH) services. As a result of this project, **2,201 women in Nigeria were screened between 2016 and 2018.**

Tanzania: Pathfinding CCP Project

To improve access and cost-effectiveness, task sharing was implemented to address the lack of skilled health care workers in local communities and private facilities to provide CCP methods. Pathfinder harmonized activities with the national CCP program, and the project screened **2,558 women between 2016 and 2018.**

Mozambique: Efficiencies for Clinical HIV Outcomes (ECHO)

The ECHO project supports Mozambique’s Ministry of Health with training, CCP consumables, and equipment for screening and treating pre-cancerous lesions in four provinces (Sofala, Manica, Tete, and Niassa). The integration of CCP services with HIV and AIDS care helped increase the demand for CCP services among at-risk populations. **In 2020 and 2021, Pathfinder supported the screening of 132,988 HIV-positive women in Mozambique.**

Kenya CCP Program

Pathfinder works with the National Cervical Cancer Technical Working Group for Cancer Prevention Screening and Early Diagnosis to achieve the global goal of eliminating cervical cancer by 2030. **In 2020, Pathfinder partnered with Nivi to create an interactive digital platform to raise awareness about HPV and cervical cancer prevention and early treatment. The platform successfully piloted in Kilifi, Mombasa, and Kwale counties over four months in 2021, reaching 160,800 people.**

Burkina Faso CCP Program

Pathfinder supports integrated CCP as part of its sexual and reproductive health program. This effort is aligned with Burkina Faso’s national strategic plan to increase cervical cancer screenings and improve service quality. Pathfinder is training health care providers to offer quality care and supporting the provision of gloves, acetic acid, iodine, and other supplies to project supported hospitals.

Côte d’Ivoire CCP Program

As part of our RMCH program support, Pathfinder is building the capacity of health care providers at select public health facilities to provide quality CCP services.

Pathfinder International is driven by the conviction that all people, regardless of where they live, have the right to decide whether and when to have children, to exist free from fear and stigma, and to lead the lives they choose. As a global health organization with locally led, community-driven programs, we support women to make their own reproductive health decisions. We work with local partners to advance contraceptive services, comprehensive abortion care, and young people’s sexual and reproductive rights in communities around the world—including those affected by poverty, conflict, climate change, and natural disasters. Taken together, our programs enable millions of people to choose their own paths forward.

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