

FIND and Unitaid invest US\$2 million to support advocacy for COVID-19 test-and-treat approaches in low- and middle-income countries

- **FIND and Unitaid are supporting 21 in-country advocacy partners across 19 low- and middle-income countries to develop and implement advocacy strategies that will improve uptake of test-and-treat approaches to combat COVID-19**
- **Projects will raise awareness of COVID-19 testing and treatment among the public, key opinion leaders, and specific high-risk and vulnerable groups**
- **Sitting within broader advocacy efforts, this initiative was conceptualised and executed by the Country Support Working Group, led by UNICEF, within the ACT-A Diagnostics Pillar**
- **This initiative complements a previously announced investment by FIND and Unitaid of US\$50 million to support early adoption of test-and-treat care packages**

GENEVA, SWITZERLAND – 13 June 2022. FIND, the global alliance for diagnostics and Unitaid are investing US\$2 million in a coordinated advocacy programme spanning 19 low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) designed to boost access and uptake of COVID-19 tests and treatments. A total of 21 organizations with a diverse range of healthcare expertise have been selected from more than 300 applicants, following a [request for proposals \(RFP\)](#) and competitive selection process that included assessment by a panel of independent reviewers. Criteria for funding included previous public health advocacy experience and expected impact of test-and-treat advocacy in the targeted region.

[FIND](#) co-leads the [Access to COVID-19 Tools \(ACT\) Accelerator](#) Diagnostics Pillar, while [Unitaid](#) co-leads the Therapeutics Pillar. The Diagnostics Pillar's Country Support Working Group, led by [UNICEF](#), includes an Advocacy, Communications and Community Engagement (ACCE) Task Force (co-led by CHAI and UNICEF), which supports test-and-treat advocacy. This initiative follows the [independent ACT-Accelerator strategic review](#) that was published in October 2021, as well as calls from civil society, which both highlighted the need for increased inclusion and meaningful engagement of LMICs, regional bodies, civil society organizations, and community representatives in the COVID-19 response. Funded activities will provide avenues for stronger involvement of these key stakeholder groups in COVID-19 test-and-treat approaches.

Projects range in duration from 6 to 18 months, and will raise awareness of COVID-19 testing and treatment among the public, key opinion leaders, and specific high-risk and vulnerable groups. Partners include (listed alphabetically by country): Mhair Educational, Health and Human Rights Organization (Afghanistan), Family Planning Association of Bangladesh (Bangladesh), IMAG Communication (Burkina Faso), Maison des Associations de lutte contre le Sida (Burkina Faso), Health Poverty Action Cambodia (Cambodia), Caritas Développement Mbujimayi (Democratic Republic of the Congo), TB Alert India (India), Pi Consulting (India), Kenya AIDS NGOs Consortium (Kenya), Health Poverty Action Laos (Laos), Caritas Lesotho (Lesotho), ESTAMOS (Mozambique), REDTRANS (Nicaragua), Shifa Foundation (Pakistan), Media for Deaf Rwanda (Rwanda), South Sudan Community Change Agency (South Sudan), Sikika (Tanzania), Université Mahmoud El Materi (Tunisia), HEPS (Uganda), Zambia Interfaith Working Group (Zambia), Pan-African Treatment Access Movement (Zimbabwe). Further information on these partners and their projects is included in the annex.

Bill Rodriguez, CEO of FIND, said: “We have the tools to defeat this pandemic, but in many areas of the world they are still not accessible to those who need them. Armed with learnings from the fight against HIV, we know that impact is best achieved when communities are empowered to advocate for patients to receive timely and appropriate test-and-treat services.”

Philippe Duneton, Executive Director of Unitaid, said: “We now have treatment options that can prevent hospitalizations and deaths for those at high risk of developing severe or critical COVID-19. Timely deployment of adequate tests and treatments in low-resource settings, especially for the people at risk of severe cases, will be key in the response to the pandemic. And supporting civil society organizations and communities, at the heart of this endeavour, is crucial for its success.”

Alexandre Costa, Senior Health Advisor at UNICEF and a co-lead of the ACCE Task Force, said: "While we have greater innovations in diagnostics for COVID-19, we are faced with a global decrease in testing rates and persisting challenges around equitable access. Testing is a key element of the response, and the best tool we have to detect outbreaks early, reduce transmission and limit the social and economic impact. Engaging communities in LMICs in a test and treat approach brings us closer to our shared goal of more equitable access."

Renuka Gadde, Senior Advisor for Global Diagnostics at CHAI and co-lead of the ACCE Task Force, said: “Testing is critical to prevent outbreaks and end the pandemic, yet it is still not regularly occurring in many low- and middle-income countries. Working with governments and communities, we can help drive understanding based on countries’ unique needs to reduce bottlenecks and ensure that tests are not only available but are regularly conducted.”

Carolyn Gomes, civil society representative to the ACT-Accelerator, said: "Financial resources are absolutely essential to the sustained mobilization of community and civil society organizations toward any disease response, with these grants providing a crucial boost to efforts to advance COVID test and treat awareness and advocacy strategies. The ACT-A community and civil society representatives to the diagnostics and therapeutics pillars applaud Unitaid and FIND’s recognition of the essential role of local community and civil society participation in health literacy and dialogue on public health policy, as well as the importance of community and civil society awareness and mobilization to maximizing equity of and access to public health interventions."

This work complements a previously announced [investment](#) by FIND and Unitaid of US\$50 million, which addresses inequities in access to COVID-19 testing and treatment, as well as supporting early adoption of comprehensive, effective, and safe care packages for people with COVID-19. More recently, at the [Second Global COVID-19 Summit](#), the Global Fund, USAID and Unitaid, together with FIND and other ACT-Accelerator partners, announced more than US\$120 million to support test-and-treat implementation with locally led solutions in over 20 low- and middle-income countries.

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About FIND

FIND, the global alliance for diagnostics, seeks to ensure equitable access to reliable diagnosis around the world. We connect countries and communities, funders, decision-makers, healthcare providers and developers to spur diagnostic innovation and make testing an integral part of sustainable, resilient health systems. We are working to save 1 million lives through accessible, quality diagnosis, and save US\$1 billion in healthcare costs to patients and health systems. We are co-convenor of the Access to COVID-19 Tools (ACT) Accelerator diagnostics pillar, and a WHO Collaborating Centre for Laboratory Strengthening and Diagnostic Technology Evaluation. For more information, please visit www.finddx.org

About Unitaid

Unitaid is a global health agency engaged in finding innovative solutions to prevent, diagnose, and treat diseases more quickly, cheaply, and effectively, in low- and middle-income countries. Its work includes funding initiatives to address major diseases such as HIV, malaria, and tuberculosis, as well as HIV co-infections and co-morbidities including advanced HIV disease, cervical cancer, and hepatitis C, and cross-cutting areas, such as fever management. Unitaid is now applying its expertise to address challenges in advancing new therapies and diagnostics for the COVID-19 pandemic, serving as a key member of the Access to COVID-19 Tools (ACT) Accelerator, co-leading with Wellcome the Therapeutics Pillar and participating in the Diagnostics Pillar. Unitaid is hosted by the World Health Organization. For more information, please visit www.unitaid.org

About the ACT-Accelerator

The [Access to COVID-19 Tools \(ACT\) Accelerator](#) is a global coalition of organizations developing and deploying the new diagnostics, treatments and vaccines needed to end the acute phase of the pandemic. Pooling the expertise of its many partners, the ACT-Accelerator has quickly ushered in rapid, affordable tests and effective medicines for low and middle-income countries and established the COVAX facility for the equitable procurement and distribution of vaccines in low- and lower-middle-income countries. The ACT Accelerator partnership was formed at the onset of the pandemic in response to a call from G20 leaders, and was launched by WHO, the European Commission, France, and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

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ANNEX

Mhair Educational, Health and Human Rights Organization (Afghanistan)

Developing and deploying advocacy strategies to promote COVID-19 diagnostic testing and linkage to care & treatment in Afghanistan's Logar, Parwan, and Wardak Provinces.

Family Planning Association of Bangladesh (Bangladesh)

Advocating for enhanced access to COVID-19 testing & treatment services involving government counterparts using communications, social media, capacity building, resource mobilization, and regional advocacy in coordination with the Directorate of Health Services under the Ministry of Health & Family Welfare of Bangladesh.

Maison des Associations de lutte contre le Sida (Burkina Faso)

Promoting testing and linkages to care for COVID-19 by utilizing key opinion leaders to disseminate messages on adherence to screening and care & treatment within their communities. Standard messages will be developed and an online media monitoring mechanism will be established to create demand and adherence to testing and linking to treatment in the national response.

IMAG Communication (Burkina Faso) Promoting COVID-19 screening, treatment, and transmission prevention by organizing advocacy sessions with community leaders and influencers. Additionally, a short documentary film and film clips will be produced to raise awareness for COVID-19 prevention and serve as communication media for advocacy and film debates.

Health Poverty Action Cambodia (Cambodia)

Advocating for rapid scale-up of community COVID-19 testing in Southeast Asia using Ag-RDTs by updating the national COVID-19 testing & control strategy and increasing institutional support for COVID-19 testing by advocating to make the price of Ag-RDT more affordable.

Caritas Développement Mbujimayi (DRC)

Influencing and transforming policies to promote COVID-19 screening and testing in DRC by engaging public health facilities with local NGOs to set up screening sites at community level. Advocacy tools will be used to engage partners and collaborate with other organizations for the implementation of the test and treat strategies.

TB Alert India (India)

Building treatment literacy and enabling advocacy skills of the COVID-19 survivors including marginalized & underserved populations to advocate for early COVID-19 diagnosis & treatment. Tailored messages on COVID-19 testing & diagnostics for advocacy & demand generation will be developed and disseminated.

Pi Consulting (India)

Deploying advocacy and communications strategies to strengthen India's diagnostic and therapeutic landscape for COVID-19 preparedness and build political will and media understanding of COVID-19 diagnostics & therapeutics. An expert- and survivor-led advocacy strategy at the national level will be implemented and supported through social and print media engagement.

Kenya AIDS NGOs Consortium (Kenya)

Ensuring that COVID-19 diagnostic testing and links to care & treatment remain a priority in national and county health strategies. Utilizing grass-roots engagement strategies, networking activities, and advocacy tools to engage in policy discussions with decision makers and media at county and national levels.

Health Poverty Action Laos (Laos)

Strengthening policies and increasing awareness on the use of COVID-19 testing and treatment. By creating an evidence-based advocacy strategy targeted at policy makers, health providers and relevant stakeholders, HPA Laos will increase accessibility to testing up to 1 per 1,000 people per day and increase knowledge and understanding on the use of testing & treatment advantages for policy makers, health staff, and community.

Caritas Lesotho (Lesotho)

Creating an enabling environment for increased testing and treatment of COVID-19 at the community level using a dynamic advocacy strategy. Targeted advocacy will be used to increasing uptake of COVID-19 testing and treatment options available at the health facilities and improving capacity of health facilities to provide free and non-restricted Covid-19 testing services.

ESTAMOS (Mozambique)

Engaging community, opinion, and religious leaders to design communication strategies and create Information Education and Communication materials. The advocacy project will produce radio shows, posters, pamphlets, leaflets, workshops, and community debates on COVID-19 testing & treatment.

REDTRANS (Nicaragua)

Focusing on the LGBTIQ community, health center mapping, message designing, discussion groups, health trainings, and community outreach will be conducted and health personnel will be trained to better prevent COVID-19. Dialogue mechanisms will be established with those who disseminate information for the care of LGBTIQ people with COVID-19.

Shifa Foundation (Pakistan)

Developing robust and evidence-based advocacy strategies to create an enabling environment for increased access to and scaled-up use of COVID-19 testing & linkage to treatment in Pakistan by increasing access and uptake of COVID-19 testing and therapeutics. Advocacy materials and initiatives will be disseminated and amplify through appropriate communication channels.

Media for Deaf Rwanda (Rwanda)

Advocating and raising awareness on COVID-19 testing & treatment for Rwandans, focusing on those who are deaf and hard of hearing. This will be achieved by conducting a national and local level advocacy and awareness campaign to ensure the Rwandan deaf community acquire relevant, timely information on testing and therapeutics.

South Sudan Community Change Agency (South Sudan)

Developing and implementing advocacy strategies through appropriate communication channels to increase prioritization of COVID-19 testing and linkage to treatment in the national pandemic response as well as generating demand for testing and therapeutics within relevant target groups.

Sikika (Tanzania)

Promoting COVID-19 diagnostic testing and linkage to care & treatment in Tanzania by increasing public awareness, increasing access and affordability of COVID-19 testing services at the public health facilities, and enhancing community engagement.

Universite Mahmoud El Materi (Tunisia)

Explaining benefits, creating a climate of trust, and advocating with the public authorities for the implementation of more incentive-based processes to provide education on the importance of testing and treated for COVID-19. Health care workers will be trained to raise awareness and communities will be engaged in discussion to improve public policies for promotion of tests and treatments against COVID-19.

HEPS (Uganda)

Developing a COVID-19 testing landscape assessment focusing on financing, procurement, and supply chain for COVID-19 diagnostics to assess public awareness of tools and attitudes around COVID testing, treatment, and vaccination. Findings will be disseminated and communication and advocacy strategies will be created. Coalition-based advocacy and accountability will improve CSOs ability to advocate to government and district officials to ensure a “test and protect” approach to COVID.

The Zambia Interfaith Working Group (Zambia)

Creating an enabling environment for increased access to and scale-up uptake of COVID-19 testing & linkage to treatment by developing ALC materials to support advocacy strategies and creating demand for COVID-19 testing. Linkages to increase access points for COVID-19 testing & treatment will be established, enabling districts to have increased capacity to plan, monitor, evaluate and ensure quality interventions are adhered to.

Pan-African Treatment Access Movement (Zimbabwe)

Catalysing an increase in testing rates as well as the equitable availability of COVID-19 testing & treatment by identifying a testing deficit partly caused by inadequate policy, implementation and community awareness, and responding to these deficiencies with a coordinated & interconnected advocacy & awareness campaign.