

COVID-19 RESPONSE IN INDIA

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OVERVIEW

India is experiencing a surge in COVID-19 cases and hospitalizations that is unprecedented in scale. The health system is stretched and there is an acute shortage of hospital beds, personnel, drugs, test kits, and life-saving oxygen. As a result, the Indian government has been working rapidly to ramp up the health infrastructure and supplies, with a focus on:

- **Oxygen supply and access to health equipment and medicine:** Procuring portable oxygen concentrators and setting up pressure swing adsorption oxygen generation plants is a key priority, as is securing therapeutics, personal protective equipment, and diagnostic kits.
- **Facility preparedness:** Establishing or augmenting health facilities across the country, including the creation of new COVID-19 care facilities and augmentation of human resources.
- **Vaccine rollout:** Delivering vaccines, now available to everyone over the age of 18, to the largest population on the planet, which will require significant logistical and supply chain support, accurate and timely communication to communities, and training of healthcare workers.

Philanthropy also has a critical role to play in responding to this crisis. In partnership with the government, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation is supporting these efforts by investing in technical assistance to set up oxygen generators, supplying funds for facility infrastructure and augmentation of human resources, and supporting technical assistance and community engagement efforts for vaccine uptake.

Help is needed from everyone. The following concept note details some of the most critical and urgent needs where the Gates Foundation sees philanthropy can help alleviate the acute needs of this crisis.

CRITICAL NEED: ACCESS TO OXYGEN SUPPLY, HEALTH EQUIPMENT, AND MEDICINE

Shortages in testing, medical equipment, and therapeutic treatments are overwhelming health systems across states in India. The Gates Foundation is working with several local non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and global partners to quickly support hospitals and communities with flexible funding to respond to rapidly evolving needs.

Oxygen, however, is the most acute need across the country. Lack of access to medical oxygen is one of the defining health inequities of our age. Since the start of the pandemic in March 2020, it is estimated that more than 38 million patients in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) have been admitted to hospitals with low blood oxygen, including eight million people infected with COVID-19. Even prior to the pandemic, approximately nine out of ten hospitals in these countries lacked access to pulse oximetry and oxygen therapy. This systemic problem is now acutely felt in India and neighboring countries like Nepal.

INVESTMENT OPPORTUNITIES: OXYGEN

- **Set up oxygen generation plants in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar:** The Gates Foundation is partnering with [PATH](#) and the government of India to install ten oxygen generation plants in government medical facilities in Uttar Pradesh and five in Bihar. These plants are critical to not only meeting the urgent need for oxygen in these states due to COVID-19, but increased production capacity will also support the management of other health conditions, such as by providing oxygen to mothers in labor, children with pneumonia, and individuals undergoing surgery.

Contact: Neeraj Jain, Country Director, PATH njain@path.org

- Facilitate timely delivery of oxygen and COVID-19 care services:** [Piramal Swasthya's](#) Aspirational Districts Transformation Program is a collaboration with [NITI Aayog](#) to bring about a transformation in health and education in districts across seven Indian states. In the current surge, Piramal Swasthya, a Gates Foundation partner, is working in direct coordination with district administrations and health departments to facilitate timely delivery of COVID-19 care services and actively working to set up oxygen concentrators in health facilities.

Contact: Ashwin Deshmukh, Vice President, Piramal Swasthya, ashwin.deshmukh@piramalswasthya.org
- Deliver lifesaving medical oxygen to those who need it the most:** [#OxygenForIndia](#) is a volunteer-led initiative founded by Ramanan Laxminarayanan of the [Center for Disease Dynamics, Economics & Policy](#) (CDDEP), a Gates Foundation partner, that delivers oxygen to the poorest who have little chance of being admitted to a hospital. They aim to provide 1,500 cylinders and 50 concentrators free of cost.

Contact: Ramanan Laxminarayanan, Director, CDDEP, ramanan@cddep.org
- Ensure availability of pulse oximeters and high-quality medical oxygen in hospitals:** The [Clinton Health Access Initiative](#) (CHAI) and the [Murdoch Children's Research Institute](#) work directly with governments and health administrators to ensure that all patients are screened for low blood oxygen and that supplies needed to provide treatment are available. The two organizations ensure that oxygen is available in all hospital wards, oxygen systems are maintained, and health facilities without oxygen can rapidly transport patients to a hospital with oxygen to receive proper care. The Gates Foundation funds their work, which focuses on several countries, including India, where this support is even more urgent today.

Contact: Jason Houdek, Senior Technical Adviser, CHAI, jhoudek@clintonhealthaccess.org
- Support community-level response focused on strengthening oxygen availability at primary and secondary healthcare facilities:** The [Transform Rural India Foundation](#) (TRIF), a Gates Foundation partner, is focused on integrated village development with the aim of accelerating inter-generational mobility. TRIF is working to support rural communities and public health systems in 73 of the least developed rural districts of India (Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh) to increase oxygen supply, ramp up testing, and provide vaccination support.

Contact: Anirban Ghose, Co-Founder, TRIF, anirban@trif.in

INVESTMENT OPPORTUNITIES: PHILANTHROPIC PLATFORMS TO MEET MEDICAL AND FACILITY NEEDS

- [GiveIndia](#), founded over 20 years ago, is India's largest giving platform with networks to trusted, local NGO partners across the country. It leveraged these partnerships when COVID-19 hit to create the India COVID Response Fund to respond to areas of highest need, providing medical equipment, testing kits, food relief, and humanitarian aid. GiveIndia recently launched a second version of the [fund](#) in response to the second deadly wave of infections. The Gates Foundation is supporting the fund to provide oxygen supply and medical equipment and set up isolation facilities and vaccination support across the country.

Contact: Atul Satija, CEO, GiveIndia, atul@giveindia.org
- [ACT Grants](#) is a fund created by India's venture capital and start-up community to provide stimulus to innovative ideas that combat COVID-19 with immediate impact. The Gates Foundation is partnering with ACT to address shortages in oxygen supply, provide medical equipment, ramp up testing, and work to scale up vaccinations.

Contact: Mohit Bhatnagar, ACT Grants, mohit.bhatnagar@sequoiacap.com
- [Dasra](#), a philanthropic and nonprofit advisory network in India and partner of the Gates Foundation, advises on where local partners need support. Recommendations include the [SaveLIFE Foundation](#), which funds the purchase and distribution of oxygen concentrators in Delhi hospitals; [Swasth](#)

[Foundation](#), which provides COVID-19 care centers in Mumbai slums; and [SWASTI](#) in Bangalore, which created the COVIDActionCollab to test communities for comorbidities (more than one infection or disease) and operates COVID-19 care centers.

Contact: Deval Sanghavi, Founder, Dasra, deval@dasra.org

CRITICAL NEED: DELIVERING VACCINES

The government of India recently announced the availability of vaccinations for all people above 18 years of age. The task of vaccinating that many people—60% of a 1.4 billion population—is daunting. Vaccine delivery, the process of getting vaccines from manufacturers to countries and into the arms of people who need them, is a massive undertaking. Procuring and delivering vaccines to port is only the start of the journey. Vaccines must be unpacked, shipped, and distributed to locations throughout the country, as well as properly refrigerated along the way. In addition, healthcare workers must be trained and made available to administer the shots with the proper PPE and vaccine record systems. Further, populations must feel confident in volunteering for the vaccine; clear communication and community engagement is essential in reducing hesitancy.

While the government is taking the lead on the vaccine rollout, philanthropy can be a critical partner in providing funding for technical assistance, communications, and community engagement.

INVESTMENT OPPORTUNITIES: VACCINE ROLLOUT

- **Ensuring timely and efficient delivery of vaccines:** [JSI Research & Training Institute](#) (JSI) has provided extensive consultation to national and state public health initiatives in India since 1980. The Gates Foundation is partnering with JSI to support the government's vaccine rollout, including COVID-19 vaccine rollout, across the country.
Contact: Dr. Pritu Dhalaria, Director, Immunization Technical Support Unit, JSI, pritu_dhalaria@in.jsi.com
- **Engaging local communities and reducing vaccine hesitancy:** The Gates Foundation is supporting [UNICEF](#) and India's Ministry of Health to provide accurate, timely, and informed messaging to the general public so that they can have confidence in vaccines. Combating hesitancy, such as by training local healthcare workers and community leaders to be vaccine champions, is critical to the success of the vaccine roll out.
Contact: Siddhartha Shrestha, Chief, Communication for Development, UNICEF, sidshrestha@unicef.org
- **Supporting stakeholders to ensure the availability of accurate information on COVID-19:** [The Center for Advocacy and Research](#) (CFAR) is an NGO that works with vulnerable communities, state governments, and media, including regional and district outlets, so that accurate, timely, and credible information on the pandemic is available to all, empowering communities to take action to protect themselves from the virus and its spread. CFAR ensures accessible scientific information is available to all stakeholders through regular dissemination, media, and community engagement.
Contact: Akila Sivadas, Managing Trustee and Executive Director, CFAR, akhila.s@cfar.org.in
- **Encouraging vaccine uptake:** Ashoka University's [Centre for Social and Behavior Change](#), a Gates Foundation partner, works with India's central and state governments to research, test, and develop communications to drive behaviors that reduce transmission of disease and improve the likelihood of vaccine uptake.
Contact: Pavan Mamidi, Director, Centre for Social and Behavior Change, pavan.mamidi@ashoka.edu.in

Gates Philanthropy Partners: Combating COVID-19 Fund

Gates Philanthropy Partners launched the Combating COVID-19 Fund in March 2020 as a way for donors to join together to help tackle the pandemic, by leveraging the expertise and grantmaking of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. Gates Philanthropy Partners provides full-service grant management and back-office support, due diligence on partners and projects, analysis and reporting with input from the foundation's technical and programmatic experts, and high-quality end-to-end service.

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For more information about how to give or the foundation's investments, please contact:

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