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A global blueprint for cervical cancer elimination: learnings from Sweden



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About this report

A global blueprint for cervical cancer elimination: learnings from Sweden is an Economist Impact report, supported by MSD. It examines the extent to which countries are meeting, and in some instances exceeding, the World Health Organization's (WHO) 90-70-90 goals for cervical cancer elimination within this century. The report describes the exemplary performance of Sweden, which could come close to eliminating cervical cancer before 2030. It also looks at other select countries, across a range of income levels, population health needs and budget constraints, that have prioritised cervical cancer as a key health priority and are now reaping the benefits of their commitment. The report is based on desk research, an in-depth literature review, and insightful interviews with a range of global and national-level experts in the field, including those involved in both upstream and downstream levels of policy, strategy and implementation. Through the synthesis of these success stories, it concludes with a 10-point plan as a baseline of recommendations for other countries to consider in their pursuit of eliminating cervical cancer.

We could not have developed this report without the critical input and support of the following experts (in alphabetical order):

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Executive summary

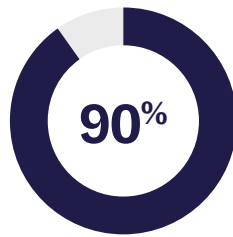
Cervical cancer is a significant global health challenge, affecting over 604,127 women and leading to 342,000 preventable deaths worldwide.¹ In Europe alone, there were 30,447 new cases and 13,437 deaths as a result of cervical cancer.² Unless contained,

and eventually eliminated, the impact of cervical cancer has the potential to destabilise economies and societies, particularly those of low- and middle-income countries (LMICs), where inadequate resourcing remains a key public health challenge that leads to a steady rise in the number of new cases and deaths from cervical cancer.³ Without swift and substantive action, the global cost of cervical cancer is expected to increase to US\$682bn between 2020 and 2050; therefore, the condition does not simply present a public health problem but a sizeable economic one.⁴

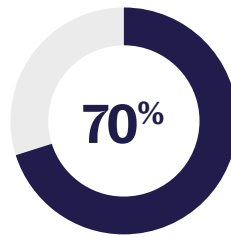
As a result of the remarkable advancements in science and technology, the goal of eliminating cervical cancer is now more viable than ever. This optimistic sentiment has been propagated and amplified through the concerted messaging efforts of multiple stakeholders, including policymakers, patients and patient advocates, bio-pharmaceutical organisations, researchers, and healthcare professionals. However, concrete plans to achieve this ambitious goal are still nascent. Building on from the World Health Organization's (WHO) global strategy for cervical cancer elimination, adopted by the World Health Assembly in August 2020,⁵ many countries have begun developing national and regional strategies in pursuit of this lofty goal. For instance, Europe's Beating Cancer Plan (EBCP), launched by the European Commission in 2021, includes, among its many goals, the elimination of cervical cancer, as well as other cancers caused by human papillomaviruses (HPV).⁶



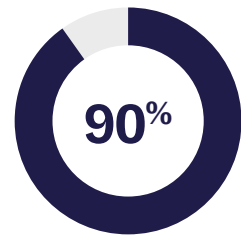
WHO's 90-70-90 targets to achieving cervical cancer elimination:



of girls fully vaccinated with HPV-vaccination by 15 years of age

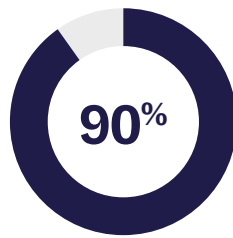


of women are screened using a high-performance test by 35 years of age and again by 45 years of age

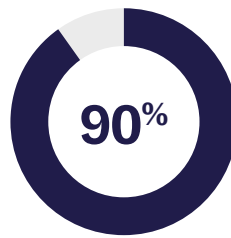


of women identified with cervical disease receive treatment

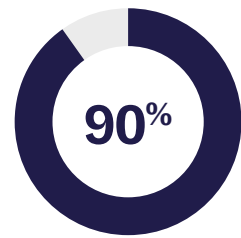
EBCP targets for cervical cancer elimination:



of the European Union's (EU) target population of girls fully vaccinated with HPV-vaccination and the vaccination of boys significantly increased by 2030



of the EU target population offered cervical cancer screening by 2025



of eligible patients have access to Comprehensive Cancer Centres for treatment by 2030

The WHO estimates that investing in interventions to meet the 90-70-90 targets would add \$28 billion to the world's economy and avert 300 000 cervical cancer deaths before 2030, over 14 million by 2070, and over 62 million by 2120.⁸ Progress towards achieving the WHO's 90-70-90 targets is highly variable both between and within countries. Several countries – particularly (but not exclusively) high-income countries (HICs) – are close to meeting, or even surpassing, the targets by 2030. Such countries include Sweden, Australia, Portugal and Rwanda, the last being the exception in the list as the only low-income country. These countries have many lessons to offer the rest of the world, particularly Sweden, which is an exemplar of success, as demonstrated by its development

of world-renowned registries, organised health programmes, evidence-based decision-making, strategies to improve vaccination coverage for both males and females, increasing screening coverage, and most importantly, through high-levels of political commitment within the country. As a result of these organised efforts, Sweden is likely to be the first country to eliminate cervical cancer by 2030.

Based on the insights of experts interviewed, published evidence and learning from countries leading the way towards cervical cancer elimination, Economist Impact recommends a 10-point plan as a baseline for policymakers to consider when developing national strategies aimed at eliminating cervical cancer.

The 10-point plan for cervical cancer elimination



Point 1

Build political commitment and momentum



Point 2

Ensure multi-stakeholder collaboration



Point 3

Prioritise HPV within national cancer policies and vaccination schedules



Point 4

Generate data through the development of robust registries



Point 5

Include screening and vaccination under universal health coverage



Point 6

Understand the target population and design the roll-out of organised and accessible immunisation programmes



Point 7

Ensure equitable vaccination and screening access to the entire population



Point 8

Address the barriers of vaccination hesitancy and misinformation



Point 9

Ensure equitable access to high-quality treatment and optimal care pathways



Point 10

Learn lessons from the Covid-19 pandemic to build system resilience and scale screening and vaccination coverage

Positively, many countries have made significant gains in their efforts to eliminate cervical cancer, with Sweden set to be the first country to achieve this before 2030, followed by Australia by 2035. But all countries studied in this report have demonstrated that political commitment is the essential foundation for achieving this ambitious goal. This political commitment is often built on evidence-based decision making, which requires actors from the health and science community to take

accountability for the generation of data to understand and communicate the true needs of their unique populations. The 10-point plan forms the baseline of actions each country should consider when developing national strategies and implementing measures aimed at the elimination of cervical cancer. The recommendations in this baseline plan will not only alleviate fiscal pressures, but also ensure that women are protected from this highly preventable cancer.

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