

25 years of expanding access to cancer care



For a quarter of a century, Novartis and The Max Foundation have worked together to help people living with cancer in low- and middle-income countries access the care they need.

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Cancer care has seen remarkable progress, but that progress has not been felt equally everywhere.

Low- and middle-income countries now account for 57% of new cancer cases yet report 65% of deaths¹, according to the American Society of Clinical Oncology, often due to barriers like shortages of trained personnel or infrastructure². In 2024 alone, there were more than 2.4 million cancer deaths in LMICs³.

Novartis and The Max Foundation have worked to change that. Together, since 2001, we have expanded access to care for people living with cancer and other critical illnesses in LMICs, reaching more than 100 000 patients. Today, we are supporting patients across 71 countries with 6 different treatments. And together, we remain committed to going further.

Providing access to a breakthrough

25 years ago, our partnership began when we contributed an innovative medicine to treat chronic myeloid leukemia (CML) to The Max Foundation at no cost. As the first targeted therapy for CML, an aggressive type of blood cancer, the treatment represented a transformative advance in management of the disease compared to previous treatment approaches.

The first patient to receive treatment through the partnership was Raul from Honduras. Raul had been diagnosed with CML in 1992, when a bone marrow transplant was his only treatment option. He continued searching for help, never lost hope, and received access to treatment in 2002. He started a family and today lives with his wife and two children near Tegucigalpa. He works in organizational consulting and served for the last 25 years as director of his local scouting association. But Raul's story was only the beginning.

Going further, together

What started with one patient and one innovative medicine soon grew into a global effort. As the partnership expanded into new countries and adapted to evolving healthcare needs, one principle remained unchanged: putting patients first.

Novartis has since expanded its commitment to the partnership by adding more innovative treatments to tackle blood cancer, breast cancer, and a rare blood disorder, broadening the reach of medicines into new patient communities. At the same time, and on top of providing innovative medicines, The Max Foundation works to overcome barriers to treatment by providing additional support through physician training, transportation assistance, patient education, and access to diagnostics to ensure patients receive quality care. These efforts strengthen health systems and enable patients to reach and sustain treatment over time.

25 years on, this initiative remains as relevant as it was back in 2001. Together, Novartis and The Max Foundation are committed to continuing the work of expanding access to cancer care for patients around the world.



"This is one of the best stories in the history of global oncology as it demonstrated that expanding access to patients in LMICs was possible. Together with Novartis, we are helping more patients, their families and communities every day. Our partnership shows that health equity is driven through actions, not words."

Pat Garcia-Gonzalez, CEO and Co-Founder of The Max Foundation.

"The last quarter century saw unprecedented advances in the treatment of cancer. In 2001, Novartis and The Max Foundation were willing to go first to bring them to patients around the globe. Our challenge for the quarter century ahead is to ensure that these advances reach more patients, in more places. That is the enduring purpose of our partnership."

Dr. Lutz Hegemann, President Global Health at Novartis.



References:

1. Oluwaseun Adebayo Bamodu et al. Cancer Care Disparities: Overcoming Barriers to Cancer Control in Low- and Middle-Income Countries. JCO Glob Oncol 10, e2300439(2024). DOI:10.1200/GO.23.00439
2. Ibid
3. WHO Global Cancer Observatory: 2024 factsheet on cancer incidence and deaths across 53 low- and middle-income countries. 2024.

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