



# Driving Multi-Sector Innovation to Advance Health Equity

Roundtable discussion hosted by Rabin Martin  
at the 76<sup>th</sup> World Health Assembly

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## Introduction

In 2023, Rabin Martin, a leading global health consulting firm, convened a multi-disciplinary group during the 76<sup>th</sup> World Health Assembly (WHA) to discuss roadblocks and opportunities to advance multi-sector innovative solutions to bridge health equity gaps that affect people across the globe.

As the world continues to grapple with the socio-economic ramifications of the COVID-19 pandemic, the health equity gap has worsened. At the same time, countries are balancing the challenges of aging populations, urbanization, epidemic preparedness, and the growing burden of non-communicable diseases (NCDs)—all while health budgets remain largely stagnant.

A multi-pronged approach across sectors—government, NGOs, business community, patient advocacy groups, multi-lateral agencies—is needed to make faster progress in building resilient health systems that enable all people to live longer, healthier lives.

Participants included industry, academia, civil society, and multilateral institutions working across various health areas—NCDs, neglected tropical diseases and other infectious diseases, and urban health. They reflected on lessons learned, best practices, and areas where greater attention is needed to develop, implement, and scale efforts to ensure greater equity in health outcomes globally. Dr. Cary Adams, CEO, Union for International Cancer Control, moderated the discussion.

### WHAT DO WE MEAN BY MULTI-SECTOR INNOVATION?

We believe that stakeholders across sectors must find new ways to collaborate—beyond funding—to drive the innovation required to close health equity gaps locally, nationally, regionally, and globally.



# Key Insights



## Strive for harmony—rather than unity

Multi-sector collaborations that focus on finding harmony in advancing a shared ambition will achieve progress faster, more effectively. Avoid getting mired in uniting all partners on every element at every step.



## Aim for equity at scale

Piecemeal approaches will not move the needle on health equity. Collaborations should consider—at the outset—how they can have a significant and broad-scale impact on equity and outcomes. An example is the City Cancer Challenge, which uses a multi-sector framework to support access to quality, equitable cancer care in more than a dozen cities around the world.



## Look beyond the usual suspects in seeking collaborations with countries

The same countries (e.g., Ghana, Kenya, Rwanda) are noted repeatedly for innovative collaborations with the private sector because of their strong political will to address health challenges and openness to work with the business community. However, to move the needle on health equity, it's important to expand beyond the “safe bets,” test solutions in less “popular” countries, and experiment with new models of collaboration.



## Ask, listen, learn, and engage communities

Too often, communities most affected by inequities in health outcomes are not at the center of multi-sector collaborations. Understanding communities' specific needs and preferences and supporting community-led solutions should be integral to collaborations aiming to overcome public health challenges. Participants highlighted strong examples of community engagement in responding to sickle cell disease.



## Demand more from political leaders—and make the economic case

Candidates for public office should be expected to have a strong plan for improving health and, once elected, government leaders must be held accountable for investing in better health outcomes. Contributions made by other sectors (i.e., other than government) are not a substitute for government's necessary investment in strengthening the health systems. Collaborations with government should emphasize the fact that health is a growing industry with a sizeable workforce and an engine for economic growth.

# Moving Forward

Although the global community has set clear goals and targets through the Sustainable Development Goals, there is no single path toward a successful, multi-sector collaborative journey to achieve better health outcomes and greater equity.

### The key is to:

- ✓ Find common ground among partners
- ✓ Set ambitious goals to respond to high disease burden and persistent disparities
- ✓ Test different models of collaboration and in varied contexts
- ✓ Leverage each partner’s strengths
- ✓ Integrate the community and ensure a continuous feedback loop from program conception through design, implementation, and evaluation
- ✓ Highlight the economic—as well as social—benefits of investing in health as an industry
- ✓ Measure impact
- ✓ Report on successes—and failures

Given this nascent field, it is essential that the global health community becomes more systematic in learning from experience in how to close health equity gaps—including case studies, communities of practice, and convenings. Generating more robust evidence on what’s working—and what’s not—are pivotal in guiding future collaborations to achieve greater and more sustainable impact in advancing health equity.

