

<https://when-worldwide.com/>

---

## Regional Leaders Advance Blended Finance Initiative to Fund Surgical Care and Health Systems Strengthening Across Latin America and the Caribbean

---

CHÍA, COLOMBIA — Senior government officials, development finance institutions, global health leaders, and civil society organizations gathered at the Escuela de Gobierno of Universidad de la Sabana and left with a mandate: build the financing architecture to make surgical care sustainable across Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC). The forum was jointly organized by Universidad La Sabana, PGSSC, Corporación Latinoamericana para la Salud and Operation Smile, and WHEN. Over two days, participants identified priority countries, defined capital stack logic, and committed to a structured co-design process with concrete deliverables ahead of the World Health Assembly.

The workshop identified countries and coalitions with enabling conditions for blended finance deployment and aligned participants on a structured co-design process to develop proposals for the Women's Health and Economic Empowerment Network (WHEN) Summit at the World Health Assembly, co-hosted with Harvard Program in Global Surgery and Social Change and Operation Smile. Regional and global health policy commitments are now being translated into investable financing structures.

Twelve countries sent delegations to Chía, each committing to advance sustainable financing for surgical care within their health systems: Argentina, Belize, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Peru, and St Vincent & The Grenadines. Their participation signals a regional coalition ready to act — not just to aspire.

Additional participants to the discussion included multilaterals, foundations, development banks, and private equity firms, such as Global Health Investment Corporation (GHIC).

### THE FINANCING GAP FOR HEALTH AND SURGICAL CARE

---

The urgency of this initiative is underscored by a body of evidence from Harvard Medical School's Program in Global Surgery and Social Change (PGSSC). Globally, an estimated 5 billion people lack access to safe, timely, and affordable surgical care — and the burden falls disproportionately on low- and middle-income countries in Latin America and beyond.

---

**5B**

People lacking access to safe, timely surgical care globally

**~1/3**

Of global disease burden requiring surgical management

**\$20.7T**

Projected cumulative economic loss from untreated surgical conditions, 2015–2030

**>50%**

Of those losses occurring in low- and middle-income countries

Research has identified Latin America as a region with growing momentum for national surgical plans and strategies to address the disparity in access to surgical care affecting 365 million Latin Americans. This body of work has also highlighted the importance of robust and government-owned financing models that can sustain and scale their implementation.

A companion analysis of innovative financing mechanisms published in *BMJ Global Health* further demonstrated that blended finance — combining catalytic public grants with private capital — is an untapped but viable pathway to expanding fiscal space for surgical care in the region.

The momentum is building at the regional level. In a landmark development coinciding with this workshop, CAF — the Development Bank of Latin America and the Caribbean — announced the creation of the Fondo de Inversión de Impacto en América Latina y el Caribe (FIIALC): the first regional impact investment fund of its kind in multilateral banking. With an initial CAF allocation of up to USD 20 million and a target fund size of USD 100–150 million, the FIIALC is designed to mobilize institutional capital — from pension funds, foundations, and multilateral banks — toward initiatives delivering both financial returns and measurable social impact. This announcement signals that the enabling environment for blended finance in Latin America is not a future aspiration; it is being built now.

## VOICES FROM THE WORKSHOP

---

*“Guatemala has long understood that health is not a cost to be managed, but an investment in the future of our people. What has been missing is not the political will — it is the financing architecture to match it. This workshop has brought together the right partners, the right evidence, and the right framework to begin closing that gap*

— Hon. Dr. Joaquin Barnoya, Minister of Health, Guatemala

*"Belize has long held ambitious goals for its health system, and this coalition has shown us that those ambitions are within reach. Through regional partnership and sustainable finance, we can build a stronger surgical workforce, broader insurance coverage, and access to oncology care for every patient who needs it. The momentum from Chía is real, and Belize is committed to carrying it forward."*

— Hon. Kevin Barnard, Minister of Health & Wellness, Belize

*"The data is unambiguous: surgical conditions represent one of the greatest — and most neglected — contributors to disease burden in Latin America. What this workshop has done is move the conversation from 'what is the problem' to 'who will finance the solution.' National surgical plans only work if there is a sustainable, country-owned financing architecture behind them. Blended finance offers exactly that pathway."*

— **Dr. Kee B. Park, Director of Policy & Advocacy, Program in Global Surgery and Social Change, Harvard Medical School**

*"Operation Smile has spent decades working alongside governments across Latin America — in Colombia, Ecuador, Brazil, and beyond — building surgical capacity at the community level. We know from experience that sustainable impact requires more than skilled surgeons. It requires political alignment and financing mechanisms that governments can own and partners can align around. This workshop moved that from aspiration to architecture."*

— **Rubén E. Ayala, Chief of Policy & Advocacy, Operation Smile**

*"Latin America has no shortage of political declarations on health — what has been missing is the collective will to follow through on them together. This workshop changed that. When governments, institutions, the private sector, and civil society sit in the same room with a shared framework and a shared timeline, something shifts. That is how regional commitments become real."*

— **Dr. Alfredo Borrero, Corporación Latinoamericana para la Salud; Former Vice President of Ecuador**

*"The investment case for health systems in Latin America has never been stronger — and the missing ingredient has never been capital. It has been structure. What this workshop has done is begin to build that structure: identifying the countries with the enabling conditions, defining the capital stack logic, and aligning the partners who can move. The Women's Health and Economic Empowerment Network is committed to deploying catalytic capital where it can unlock the most impact."*

— **Joanne Manrique, Co-Chair, WHEN -The Women's Health and Economic Empowerment Network**

*"The School of Government at Universidad de La Sabana is proud to have hosted a workshop that delivered exactly what our mission calls for: building bridges between sectors, regions, and generations to drive real change. Latin America will only achieve health equity when its governments have the financing tools, the policy frameworks, and the institutional capacity to deliver on their commitments. That work began here — and Colombia is honored to lead the way."*

— **Dr. María Carmellina Londoño, Director School of Government, Universidad de la Sabana**

*“The Dominican Republic has made health systems strengthening a national priority — and we know that ambition alone is not enough. Sustainable progress requires financing structures that governments own, that partners can align around, and that are built for the long term. The Dominican Republic is ready to be part of this process — and to demonstrate that the Caribbean can lead.”*

— Dr. Andelys de la Rosa, Director of Non Communicable Disease, Ministry of Health, Dominican Republic

*“Advancing global health investment requires collaboration across governments, development banks, philanthropies, and private investors. Blended capital structures can help unlock private investment, but they depend on strong partnerships, regulatory certainty, and a pipeline of bankable projects. What is encouraging about this convening is the shared focus on building those foundations to expand access and strengthen health systems across Latin America and the Caribbean. With the right alignment of incentives, there is significant potential to mobilize capital to deliver meaningful health impact across the region.”*

— Joseph Lee, Principal, Global Health Investment Corporation (GHIC)

## WHAT THE WORKSHOP DELIVERED

---

Across two days of working sessions, participants made decisions and established clear next steps:

- Assessed country readiness across LAC using criteria including government demand, implementation infrastructure, credible payer pathways, and catalytic capital opportunities and produced a preliminary shortlist of priority countries.
- Selected a preliminary shortlist of priority countries as potential inaugural participants in a Sustainable Financing Facility for Latin America, with health systems strengthening and surgical care as core investment themes.
- Assigned roles for development finance institutions, private equity, philanthropy, and technical partners in co-designing blended finance structures.
- Launched a structured workstream to develop case study outlines, financial models, capital stack logic, and governance frameworks.

## WHAT COMES NEXT: A PATHWAY TO THE WORLD HEALTH ASSEMBLY

---

Starting now, priority country teams — comprising government counterparts, DFIs, technical partners, the private sector, and investors — will develop case study blueprints translating national

health priorities into fundable, sustainable finance structures. These are not discussion papers; they are investment proposals.

The case studies will be presented at the WHEN Women's Health Summit at the World Health Assembly — where participating organizations will report on progress, announce capital commitments, and set the next phase of deployment. WHEN, Harvard PGSSC, Universidad La Sabana, PGSSC, Corporación Latinoamericana para la Salud and Operation Smile have committed to a continued partnership in the coming months, to support the advancement of sustainable financing for surgical care in Latin America and the Caribbean.

## **ABOUT THE ORGANIZERS**

### **WHEN**

The Women's Health and Economic Empowerment Network (WHEN) is a blended finance and innovation platform dedicated to expanding access to healthcare, capital, and opportunity for women worldwide. Founded to align leaders across G7 governments, UN agencies, the private sector, and philanthropy, WHEN designs and scales solutions that unlock financing for emerging sectors, including health, education, energy, and entrepreneurship.

WHEN works across the full financing spectrum—from technical assistance and grant capital to concessional loans, guarantees, and equity investment—helping programs close critical funding gaps and achieve sustainable, systems-level impact.

WHEN creates enduring impact through our funds and deal structures to advance women's health and economic empowerment. Centring gender equity, social inclusion, and sustainability into every initiative not only improves outcomes for women and girls but also unlocks broader health and economic gains that benefit entire communities and the world as a whole.

### **Program in Global Surgery and Social Change, Harvard Medical School**

The Program in Global Surgery and Social Change (PGSSC) at Harvard Medical School is a multidisciplinary initiative dedicated to advancing universal access to safe, timely, and affordable surgical, anesthesia, and obstetric care globally, with a strong focus on social justice, equity, and evidence-based solutions. Founded in 2010, PGSSC brings together faculty, fellows, and collaborators from clinical, public health, policy, and research backgrounds to strengthen surgical systems—especially in low- and middle-income countries—through research, policy, advocacy, and education. The program fosters partnerships with local and international stakeholders to drive sustainable improvements in surgical access and outcomes.

### **Operation Smile**

Operation Smile is a globally recognized nonprofit, founded in 1982, that specializes in providing free, safe surgery and care to children and young adults living in countries with under-resourced health systems. It has delivered over 500,000 surgeries and reached more than 1,000,000 patients with broader care in recent years. Operation Smile also invests in local healthcare systems, trains medical professionals, and partners with governments and corporations to ensure sustainable access to quality treatment and to empower underserved communities.

### **Corporación Latinoamericana para la Salud**

Corporación Latinoamericana Para la Salud is a regional nonprofit organization focused on improving health outcomes throughout Latin America. CLS works to strengthen health systems, promote health equity, and support the development of sustainable healthcare strategies by collaborating with governments, academic institutions, and international partners. Their initiatives often emphasize capacity building, policy advocacy, and the implementation of innovative health solutions tailored to the needs of underserved populations across the continent.

### **Universidad de La Sabana**

Universidad de La Sabana is a leading private university in Chía, Colombia, widely recognized for academic excellence, high-impact research, and a strong commitment to social transformation. Beyond its educational mission, the University has emerged as a regional and increasingly global leader in shaping health and development agendas through evidence-informed policy engagement. Through its health sciences programs and interdisciplinary academic ecosystem, Universidad de La Sabana advances innovation in medicine, public health, and health systems strengthening, while actively convening partnerships among academia, government, civil society, and international organizations. Its contribution extends from knowledge generation to policy translation, helping drive concrete action on priority health challenges in Latin America and the Caribbean and positioning the University as a trusted platform for dialogue, advocacy, and implementation-oriented solutions.

---

**For Media and Partnership Inquiries, please contact Taylor Bourne, Director of Partnerships at [taylor@when-worldwide.com](mailto:taylor@when-worldwide.com)**