

PPATS completes design of Spillover Prevention Accelerator

Summary

With generous support from the Novo Nordisk Foundation¹ and the Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation, PPATS has completed a feasibility assessment of, and developed initial plans for, the Spillover Prevention Accelerator (SPA). The SPA – a first of its kind mechanism that seeks to fill a critical gap in pandemic prevention efforts – aims to channel funding to cost-effective, innovative, and scalable interventions that reduce zoonotic spillover, carefully measure the impact of those interventions, and ultimately promote scaling of solutions to reduce the risk of future pandemics globally.

Context

Spillover of infectious diseases from wild animals to humans, driven by human impact on nature, is the major source of pandemic risk – and rates of spillover are increasing. Despite evidence for actions that could reduce spillover risk, almost all ongoing pandemic prevention efforts by governments, international organizations, foundations, and civil society focus only on measures to contain, control, and mitigate outbreaks.

Despite the cost-effectiveness and co-benefits of spillover prevention, governments and other key actors are not funding and implementing them at even moderate scale. For \$10-20 billion per year, the risk of spillover could be significantly reduced worldwide. This represents only three percent of the annualized costs incurred due to zoonotic diseases globally and is a small investment compared to the millions of lives and trillions in economic losses caused by the COVID-19 pandemic alone. Governments are, however, not currently developing programs for spillover prevention beyond some small, piecemeal projects. Other key institutions, including the Pandemic Fund and major public health foundations that are determining the future shape and scope of the global health and pandemic prevention architecture, also continue to largely overlook spillover prevention measures.

Methodology

Over the course of five months, we worked in close collaboration with a special working group within the Preventing Pandemics at the Source coalition, expert advisors, and a team from Dalberg Advisors to conduct a feasibility assessment and concept design for the SPA. The findings are based on desk research and interviews with global and regional experts from Southeast Asia, West Africa, and South America. Dr. Aaron Bernstein, former Director of The Center for Climate, Health, and the Global Environment at Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, conducted interviews with scientific experts that helped inform how the SPA will generate evidence and advance the research agenda on spillover prevention. In addition, we consulted a wide range of health, conservation, and development funders to gauge their appetite to fund such an endeavor.

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Findings

There is a strong investment case for spillover prevention. A new accelerator to catalyze funding and implementation on spillover prevention would ideally address three critical gaps:

1. **Support localized solutions** co-created with communities who are the first to experience the impact of spillover events - in turn, building long-term capacity for spillover prevention;
2. **Build the evidence base** about what works and why in spillover prevention, and distill the learning into useful knowledge products to support policy advocacy;
3. **Build awareness and influence priorities** with an evidence-based case for investment to contribute to a major shift in how decision makers perceive and pursue pandemic prevention strategies.

There are many systemic barriers to spillover prevention, which cannot all be addressed by a new mechanism. The SPA is designed to address several of the main barriers to spillover prevention including the lack of knowledge and tools for measuring and managing spillover risk and the weak coordination across sectoral siloes in governments and philanthropy. However, there are systemic barriers to funding spillover prevention such as the long-term nature of the investment, less visible or easily attributable results than containment measures, and potential conflict with short-term economic interests. The SPA can help minimize these barriers by contributing to a strong evidence-based case for investment, but it cannot fully address them.

Securing support from committed funders is critical, especially as this area is currently under-invested. Funders tend to be risk-averse, are often unfamiliar with or lack understanding of spillover prevention, and sometimes want more rigorous evidence before committing funding. It is therefore helpful to find “committed champions” who are willing to take a risk, be flexible as the effort takes shape, and can champion the cause with other funders.

A time-bound mechanism can be more effective than a new, permanent fund. Our ongoing assumption had been that a new fund was needed to catalyze investment in spillover prevention, given that existing financial mechanisms such as the Pandemic Fund have not prioritized spillover prevention (*note that we are currently in productive discussions with the Secretariat of the Pandemic Fund about how they can help address this need*). However, we realized through the feasibility study that it would be more effective and sustainable to set up the SPA as a timebound initiative that aims to shift funder priorities and accelerate other funding flows for spillover prevention.

For the full set of findings, including the initial plan, please refer to the [summary document](#).

Looking ahead

Prior to moving ahead with the SPA, we recognize the need to further elevate the profile of the evidence-base for spillover prevention with key health decision-makers. To that end, in October 2023, we launched the [Lancet-PPATS Commission on Prevention of Viral Spillover](#). Through the Commission, we aim to build the scientific foundations, policy recommendations, and momentum to launch the SPA and de-risk its implementation in priority regions.

The new Commission will also help to refine the research component of the SPA. The Commission and the SPA will be deeply interconnected, with the former providing world-class scientific and

policy guidance to the SPA and the latter (once launched) helping test approaches and feeding back into the work of the Commission. For more on the Commission, please see this [Comment piece](#) published in *The Lancet*.

We are scaling back our discussions with potential anchors until the Lancet-PPATS Commission has completed its work. Our discussions with government agencies and private foundations to date indicate strong interest and receptivity to this work. In particular, governments and foundations recognize the value of building the science and evidence base on spillover prevention while taking action on the ground in priority countries and engaging with policymakers and major institutions throughout the process. Nonetheless, we are also encountering structural barriers between health and conservation, both within governments and within foundations. We believe there is a necessary sequence: to first raise awareness through the Lancet-PPATS Commission, to then have Commissioners identify or design the necessary interventions in high-risk countries, and to subsequently secure buy-in of governments and potential funders. We are currently actively raising funds for the *Lancet-PPATS* Commission.