

HIV advocates around the world are calling for greater political and financial support to introduce and roll out the dapivirine vaginal ring.

They're sounding the alarm that adding this option to existing strategies for HIV prevention will save lives and offer real choices to the people who need them most.

The ring, now approved in a growing number of countries, offers women a discreet method of HIV prevention and one more option that may fit their needs best at any given time.

The World Health Organization shared findings Tuesday from consultations with national ministries of health, civil society, ring users, donors, implementing partners, and other key stakeholders in countries across Africa, which explored questions and priorities related to the introduction of the ring.

The WHO reported on resounding support for the ring, a clear commitment to expanding the choices for HIV prevention options.

These findings come amidst growing concern that leading funders will not support programs to procure and offer the ring.

During the WHO meeting – feminists and African advocates called on USAID, PEPFAR, the Global Fund and national governments to fund the ring.

Lilian Mworeko, the Executive Director and founding member of the International Community of Women living with HIV Eastern African (ICWEA) said, “40 years of crying and we don't have the options we need for women facing HIV risks. How do we make the ring available to work toward ending AIDS by 2030?”

In a statement that followed the WHO consultation, a coalition of advocates applauded the WHO for its ongoing support and its 2021 recommendation of the ring as an additional prevention option for women.

They call on funders, country governments and community leaders to sustain their support for the ring's introduction and rollout in African countries where it is needed and for prompt regulatory reviews.

And they call on HIV programs to integrate the ring, and collaborate with communities on the design of those programs.

In the coming days, weeks and months, funders and policy makers must hear this call. Advocates called on PEPFAR and USAID for a discussion and are also engaging decision-makers in their communities and countries.