**WASH IN HEALTHCARE: A NEW GLOBAL HEALTH MOVEMENT**

**CENTERS OF INFECTION**

One of the most serious issues facing global health is also one of the most solvable. Safe water, functioning toilets, and soap must be present in all hospitals and health clinics in order to provide safe and dignified care; protect women and newborns during childbirth; prevent infections in patients and staff; carry out safe surgery; and prevent and contain pandemics and antibiotic resistance—issues that affect us all. And because the majority of healthcare workers and those utilizing healthcare services are women, the lack of Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) in healthcare facilities (HCFs) disproportionately affects women. Without WASH, HCFs are Centers of Infection, not Centers of Healing.

In the [first global assessment](https://www.who.int/news-room/detail/03-04-2019-1-in-4-health-care-facilities-lacks-basic-water-services-unicef-who) (2019), WHO/UNICEF analyzed data from 560,000 HCFs in 125 countries and found:

* 2 billion people must rely on HCFs that lack basic water services
* 1.5 billion people must rely on HCFs without adequate sanitation
* 17 million women in Least Developed Countries give birth in HCFs without adequate WASH every year
* 45% of HCFs in Least Developed Countries lack basic water services
* Barely 25% of HCF operating plans and budgets in developing countries have a line item for WASH

**FAST-GROWING MOVEMENT**

Several dozen public and private organizations met in January 2018 in Washington, DC, and agreed to address this neglected global health crisis. Efforts are quickly producing results:

* **March 2018**: UN Secretary-General Guterres issued a global Call to Action to get WASH into all HCFs.
* **March 2019**: The Vatican, a major provider of healthcare, requested all HCFs affiliated with the Catholic Church evaluate and remedy gaps in WASH as part of the Vatican’s strategy for ensuring human development.
* **April 2019**: 40 of the largest faith-based organizations, representing more than 40% of healthcare in some regions, met to coordinate efforts to increase WASH in HCFs.
* **April 2019**: WHO/UNICEF released the [first global assessment](https://www.who.int/news-room/detail/03-04-2019-1-in-4-health-care-facilities-lacks-basic-water-services-unicef-who) and [recommendations for action](https://www.washinhcf.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/2019_WASH-in-HCF-Practical-Solutions-for-Universal-Access-to-Quality-Care_2April-compressed.pdf).
* **May 2019**: The 194 Member States of the World Health Assembly unanimously passed a [resolution](https://apps.who.int/gb/ebwha/pdf_files/WHA72/A72_R7-en.pdf) with clear practical steps for governments and partners to get WASH into HCFs worldwide.
* **June 2019**: The [‘What Women Want’](https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5aa813dd3917ee6dd2a0e09e/t/5d1120ccdf7cbc0001b99c57/1561403606693/What-Women-Want_Global-Findings.pdf) survey of 1.2 million women and girls in 114 countries revealed that WASH in HCFs was their 2nd highest ranking healthcare demand after dignity to improve reproductive and maternal health services.
* **June 2019**: Financial institutions, corporations, philanthropies, non-governmental organizations, faith-based organizations and universities gathered in Washington, DC to announce historic [commitments](https://www.washinhcf.org/resource/summary-of-stakeholder-commitments-on-wash-in-health-care-facilities-june-2019/) to WASH in HCF funding, technical assistance, research, training, maintenance and advocacy. The Colombian First Lady and the UN Secretary-General appeared by video. Commitments continue to grow and now total over 90 separate commitments.
* **September 2019**: Hosted by Zambia, WHO/UNICEF called [a meeting of national governments](https://www.washinhcf.org/resource/from-resolution-to-revolution-2019-global-meeting-report/) to help generate plans and support to achieve 100% WASH in HCF coverage by 2030.
* **January 2020**: [WHO cites](https://www.who.int/news-room/photo-story/photo-story-detail/urgent-health-challenges-for-the-next-decade) the absence of water, toilets, soap and waste management in HCFs among the most urgent global health challenges in the coming decade.

**KEY TO SUCCESS**

The single most important challenge is sustainability. Sustainability requires leadership and coordination among water, health and finance sectors — local to global. Without sustainability, broken pipes, pumps, wells and more will rollback WASH efforts that make healthcare safer.

**CORNERSTONE OF HEALING**

Improved WASH will save countless lives and move HCFs as centers of infection to the cornerstone of healthier communities across Africa, Latin America and Asia.

**Learn more and share best practices, partnerships, news and events, and the growing list of actionable commitments being made to solve this solvable global issue:** [**www.washinhcf.org**](http://www.washinhcf.org).