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

**FROM CENTERS OF INFECTION TO CORNERSTONE OF HEALING**: One of the most serious issues facing global health is one of the most solvable. The widespread lack of safe water, functioning toilets, and soap in hospitals and health clinics around the world undercuts the ability 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. Because the majority of healthcare workers and those seeking health services are women, they are disproportionately affected.

COVID-19 and the inability for healthcare workers to adequately wash their hands merely underscores that the lack of Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) in healthcare facilities (HCFs) is an essential service and foundational need for global health. The economic impact is also great: Poor-quality care in low- and middle- income countries (LMICs) imposes costs of [US$1.4 to $1.6 trillion per year](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK535654/) in lost productivity. Improving WASH will save countless lives, improve economies, and make HCFs the cornerstone of healthy communities.

**SCOPE OF PROBLEM REVEALED:** WHO/UNICEF first highlighted the absence of WASH in HCFs in low- and middle-income countries in 2015. In 2020, WHO/UNICEF issued its most recent [Global Progress Report](https://www.washinhcf.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/9789240017542-eng-1.pdf) based on data from 794,000 facilities in 165 countries. Poor conditions are widespread due to the lack of WASH. In the world’s 47 least developed countries:

* 1.8 billion people must rely on HCFs that lack basic water services
* 800 million people must rely on HCFs without sanitation facilities
* 50% of HCFs do not have basic water services
* 63% of HCFs do not have basic sanitation services
* 26% of HCFs do not have hand hygiene facilities at point of patient care

**PROGRESS:** January 2018, several dozen public and private allies from across WASH and health organizations met in Washington, DC and agreed to seek to address this neglected global health crisis. Since then, a global movement has taken root. Dignitaries are speaking out including UN Secretary General Guterres, WHO’s Dr. Tedros, UNICEF Executive Director Henrietta Fore, heads of state and First Ladies, Vatican officials and even the Dalai Lama:

* **March 2018**: UN Secretary-General Guterres issued a [global Call to Action](https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/statement/2018-03-22/secretary-generals-remarks-launch-international-decade-action-water) to get WASH into all HCFs.
* **March 2019**: The Vatican, a major provider of healthcare globally, requested all HCFs affiliated with the Catholic Church evaluate and remedy gaps in WASH as part of the its 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 better 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 global [‘What Women Want’](https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5aa813dd3917ee6dd2a0e09e/t/5d1120ccdf7cbc0001b99c57/1561403606693/What-Women-Want_Global-Findings.pdf) survey of 1.2 million women revealed that demand for WASH in HCFs was second only to 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 dozens of [commitments](https://www.washinhcf.org/resource/summary-of-stakeholder-commitments-on-wash-in-health-care-facilities-june-2019/) for funding, technical assistance, research, training, maintenance and advocacy for WASH in HCF. The Colombian First Lady and the UN Secretary-General appeared by video. By year’s end, nearly 100 commitments had been made.
* **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. That same month, an unidentified deadly virus strikes Wuhan, China and with no cure, handwashing becomes central to its prevention and containment. 2020 will be defined by the healthcare workers who not only lacked PPE, they could not adequately wash their hands.
* **November 2020:** [The Sanitation and Hygiene Fund](https://www.shfund.org/) is launched and included raising funds for HCF sanitation.
* **December 2020:** WHO/UNICEF released the [Global Progress Report](https://www.washinhcf.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/9789240017542-eng-1.pdf) on WASH in HCFs.

**SUSTAINABILITY IS 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 faucets will rollback WASH efforts that make healthcare safer. **Learn more about commitments and share best practices, partnerships, news and events at:** [**www.washinhcf.org**](http://www.washinhcf.org)