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

**CENTERS OF INFECTION**

*"A healthcare facility without WASH is not a healthcare facility."*  
  - Dr. Maria Neira, Director of Public Health and Environment, World Health Organization

Healthcare workers, patients, mothers and newborn are endangered simply for the lack of Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) inside hundreds of thousands of healthcare facilities (HCFs) around the world. HCFs are littered with broken wells, pumps, pipes, toilets and sinks that have fallen into disrepair. Others never had them. These Centers of Healing are Centers of Infection, yet this global health crisis is as serious as it is solvable.

COVID-19 is but one of dozens of illnesses and diseases that requires access to safe water for prevention and containment. Safe water, functioning toilets and soap must be present in every hospital and health clinic to provide safe and dignified care. Surgeons are asked to perform safe surgery under unsafe conditions. Staff must stay safe and prevent infections in patients. Women must either risk of giving birth at home, or haul their own water, of questionable quality, to give birth in facilities that cannot be adequately cleaned; where umbilical cords are cut with dirty instruments on tables wiped down with dirty rags, and women cannot wash themselves after giving birth. The ability to control pandemics and antibiotic resistance is impossible. The economic impact is 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. The collective impact affects us all.

Because the majority of nurses, midwives, cleaners and those utilizing healthcare services are women, the lack of WASH disproportionately affects women and they want water. When 1.2 million women and girls in 114 countries responded to the ['What Women Want’](https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5aa813dd3917ee6dd2a0e09e/t/5d1120ccdf7cbc0001b99c57/1561403606693/What-Women-Want_Global-Findings.pdf) survey of priorities to improve reproductive and maternal health services, WASH in HCFs was the highest-ranking demand after dignity.

**SCOPE OF PROBLEM REVEALED**

In 2015, WHO/UNICEF first highlighted the widespread absence of WASH in HCFs in LMICs. 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

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An [MIT survey](https://covidsurvey.mit.edu/dashboard.html) asked what precautions would determine if patients would visit a healthcare setting with no COVID-19 safeguards and handwashing facilities ranked highest. With the scarcity of personal protective equipment (PPE), WASH is the only line of defense against the spread of COVID-19 for millions of healthcare workers and patients. But long before COVID, and long after, staff on the frontlines of curing and preventing illnesses and diseases cannot adequately wash their hands.

**A GLOBAL MOVEMENT HAS TAKEN ROOT**

*"We must work to prevent the spread of disease.*

*Improved water, sanitation and hygiene in health facilities is critical to this effort."*  
- UN Secretary-General António Guterres on World Water Day 2018

Beginning 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 about getting WASH in HCFs, including UN Secretary General Guterres, WHO’s Dr. Tedros, UNICEF Executive Director Henrietta Fore, multiple First Ladies, Vatican officials and even the Dalai Lama:

* **March 2018**: UN Secretary-General Guterres issues 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) for WASH into all healthcare facilities.
* **April 2019**: Faith-based organizations, representing more than 40% of healthcare in some regions, gather to coordinate efforts to increase WASH in healthcare facilities.
* **April 2019**: WHO/UNICEF release the [**first baseline**](https://washdata.org/sites/default/files/documents/reports/2019-04/JMP-2019-wash-in-hcf.pdf) of WASH in healthcare facilities, and launched their implementation strategy to respond to the Call to Action, which includes [ambitious targets and metrics for success](https://www.washinhcf.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/52608-WHO-WASH-in-HCF_UK_Web.pdf#page=10).
* **May 2019**: The 194 Member States of the World Health Assembly (WHA) unanimously pass a [**Resolution**](https://apps.who.int/gb/ebwha/pdf_files/WHA72/A72_R7-en.pdf), along with the [8 Practical Steps](https://www.washinhcf.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/52608-WHO-WASH-in-HCF_UK_Web.pdf) for governments and partners to get WASH into healthcare facilities worldwide.
* **June 2019**: White Ribbon Alliance’s  [‘What Women Want’](https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5aa813dd3917ee6dd2a0e09e/t/5d1120ccdf7cbc0001b99c57/1561403606693/What-Women-Want_Global-Findings.pdf) survey reveals WASH in healthcare is second only to women’s demand for dignity in their healthcare.
* **June 2019**: Financial institutions, corporations, philanthropies, NGOs, FBOs, 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 healthcare facilities. To-date, over 100 commitments have been made.
* **September 2019**: Hosted by Zambia, WHO/UNICEF call [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 coverage in healthcare facilities 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 healthcare facilities among the most urgent global health challenges in the coming decade. This same month, the COVID-19 pandemic emerges a global health crisis.
* **October 2020**: PAHO hosts the first of the regional leadership summits on WASH in HCF, brings together Ministries of Health and Water, [First Ladies](https://youtu.be/mMsariSfPw8), UN agencies and external support agencies in [Latin American and the Caribbean](https://www.paho.org/en/events/symposium-water-sanitation-and-hygiene-all-healthcare-facilities-urgent-action) to share progress and determine next steps.
* **November 2020:** [The Sanitation and Hygiene Fund](https://www.shfund.org/) is launched to address the sanitation, hygiene, and menstrual health crises as a new funding model that can operate at scale.
* **December 2020:** WHO/UNICEF release the [Global Progress Report](https://www.washinhcf.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/9789240017542-eng-1.pdf) on WASH in healthcare facilities, indicating someprogress but planning and financing remain inadequate, as does monitoring of WASH services to ensure sustainability.
* **March 2021:** The Catholic Church, the largest single unified provider of healthcare in the world, under the Vatican Dicastery for Integral Human Development led by Cardinal Peter K. A. Turkson, [launches](https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/it/bollettino/pubblico/2021/03/21/0172/00376.html) the Catholic WASH in Healthcare Facilities Initiative, calling for WASH in all Catholic facilities, starting with a pilot program in 150 Catholic healthcare facilities in 23 countries.
* **April 2021:** The second regional leadership summit is organized by WHO AFRO.
* **May 2021:** During the 74th World Health Assembly, WHO provided a [progress report](https://apps.who.int/gb/ebwha/pdf_files/WHA74/A74_43Rev1-en.pdf) on WASH in healthcare facilities and [Indonesia](https://apps.who.int/gb/statements/WHA74/PDF/Indonesia-34.1e.pdf), [Malawi](https://apps.who.int/gb/statements/WHA74/PDF/Malawi-34.pdf), [Philippines](https://apps.who.int/gb/statements/WHA74/PDF/Philippines-34a.pdf), and [Zambia](https://apps.who.int/gb/statements/WHA74/PDF/Zambia-34C.pdf) provided written statements.
* **June 2021:** Faith-inspired funders, healthcare systems, organizations and networks gather again to review progress and look to what lies ahead for the faith-inspired sector.

**SUSTAINABILITY IS KEY TO SUCCESS**

*"If you can't do the basics forget the rest. Prevention, prevention, prevention."*   
  - Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Director-General, World Health Organization

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.

**FROM CENTERS OF INFECTION TO CORNERSTONES OF HEALING**

The challenge is great, but the impact of making sustainable WASH second nature in every HCF is far greater. WASH in health care facilities is an essential service and a “force multiplier”, fundamental to achieving major healthcare objectives, with returns in improved health and economic stability and growth. Hundreds of millions of people stand to benefit across Africa, Latin America and Asia.Countless lives will be saved as HCFs move from centers of infection to the cornerstone of healthier and more prosperous communities. Where local, national and global leaders take us in the months and years ahead is fundamental global health everywhere.

Metrics for success: By 2021: all WHA Member States have completed and reported baseline WASH in health care facility assessments, set national targets that identify and address sub-national disparities, and developed and are implementing national standards. By 2023: WHA all Member States have included improved WASH services in plans, budgets, and implementation efforts for improving quality of care, strengthening infection prevention and control, preventing antimicrobial resistance, and supporting the commitment to universal health coverage. By 2025: at least 50 WHA Member States that did not have universal access in 2016 have met or exceeded their own national targets.

**Learn more about commitments and share best practices, partnerships, news and events at:** [**www.washinhcf.org**](http://www.washinhcf.org)