

**Group of Friends  
in Support of  
Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) in Healthcare Facilities**

**Background: A Global Call to Action**

Today, more than ever, the health and wellbeing of many populations throughout the world are seriously jeopardized by the crisis of inadequate WASH in hospitals, health clinics and birthing facilities. The lack of these essential health services impacts nearly 2 billion people (notably women and children), and communities in low-and-middle income countries suffer greatest from this devastating humanitarian (and economic) problem.

The imperative for adequate WASH in healthcare facilities has broad implications for quality of health, infection prevention and control, maternal and child health, anti-microbial resistance, reduction of diarrheal diseases, and health systems strengthening that is key to universal health coverage. The topic has wider impact on diverse priorities of the UN system, including poverty reduction, women's empowerment, economic growth and security, and many other critical concerns.

Confronting this urgent crisis, UN Secretary-General António Guterres announced a global Call to Action in March 2018, emphasizing that access to WASH in healthcare facilities (HCF) is fundamental to the achievement of universal health coverage. It is also central to progress in achieving critical Sustainable Development Goals.

Led by the World Health Organization (WHO) and UNICEF, the response to the Call to Action has, to date, inspired the development of a comprehensive global response strategy and a unanimously adopted resolution of the 72<sup>nd</sup> World Health Assembly, committing member states to develop national roadmaps, set and monitor targets, increase investments in infrastructure and human resources, and strengthen systems to improve and sustain WASH services in healthcare facilities.

The current COVID pandemic has brought this global need into even sharper focus. Now, more than ever, WASH in healthcare facilities must be a foremost priority for governments, funders, and development assistance organizations alike. Progress demands an adequate level of support for sustainable, and accountable, WASH services in healthcare facilities, regularly monitored by competent authorities.

The WHO is developing a general reporting mechanism to capture and monitor progress of member states to meet the goals set forth in the Resolution. At the same time, every effort will be needed to encourage member state leadership across all relevant sectors (health, water and sanitation, finance, rural and urban development, etc.) to join in coordinated, multi-disciplinary responses to the Call to Action.

## **The Group of Friends: Addressing Inadequate WASH in Healthcare Facilities**

In response to the high-level commitment of Member states to the UNSG Call to Action and the Resolution of the 72<sup>nd</sup> World Health Assembly, a **Group of Friends (GoF) in Support of Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) in Healthcare Facilities** was created to ensure progress in member state action and the widest possible connection of this topic to UN priorities.

The Group of Friends for WASH in HCF will help generate greater national commitment and accountability to this urgent crisis. The GoF will help coordinate this issue across UN organizations and related UN thematic priorities, many of which extend beyond health care and disease prevention to poverty reduction, women's empowerment, economic growth and security, and many other critical concerns.

The Group of Friends for WASH in HCF is committed to raising the profile of safe water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) and infection prevention and control (IPC) in health care facilities, within WHO and at high-level political forums, and with other United Nations agencies that can collectively respond to the United Nations Secretary General's call to action and advance the relevant Sustainable Development Goals.

The GoF mission is aimed at supporting government efforts to empower communities to participate in the decision-making concerning the provision of better and more equitable safe water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) services in health facilities, from the identification of inadequacies to the assurances of policies, procedures, and funding mechanisms for sustained implementation of WASH services in all facilities.

The GoF mission will also help catalyze the mobilization of domestic and external resources from the public and private sectors, and to support the development of national business cases for investment in safe water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) and infection prevention and control (IPC) in health care facilities.

These measures will be achievable if Member States are encouraged to develop and implement national road maps and targets for safe water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) in health care facilities, monitoring progress on the coordination, implementation, financing, access, quality and governance according to established indicator reporting methodology for Sustainable Development Goals.

Recognizing global health challenges today and in the future, the GoF will emphasize the special need for Member State coordination and implementation of safe water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) and basic infection prevention and control (IPC) measures in health care facilities and triage centers in times of crisis and humanitarian emergencies, leveraging partnerships to prevent disease outbreaks in these contexts.