

## WATER, SANITATION, AND HYGIENE IN HEALTHCARE FACILITIES



## THE FACTS

- » Globally, half of healthcare facilities lack a basic handwashing service, one in five lacks a basic water service, and one in ten has no functional sanitation facilities (WHO/UNICEF, 2022)
- » An estimated 742 million people use healthcare facilities with no water service, and 660 million use facilities with no sanitation service (WHO/UNICEF, 2022)
- » 16.6 million women give birth in facilities with inadequate WASH services every year in the least developed countries (WHO/UNICEF, 2022)
- » 260,000 mothers die from complications related to childbirth each year (WHO, 2023)
- » More than 400,000 babies die each year in the first month of life from infection or diarrhea (The Lancet, 2021)

## About World Vision

World Vision is a Christian humanitarian organization dedicated to working with children, families, and their communities worldwide to reach their full potential by tackling the causes of poverty and injustice. World Vision serves all people, regardless of religion, race, ethnicity, or gender. Established in 1950, World Vision's global partnership operates in nearly 100 countries, including implementation countries, along with country offices focused on fundraising and technical support, as well as regional and global teams providing quality assurance. Nearly 40,000 staff members—95% of whom work in their own countries—work in health; education; livelihoods; food security; child protection; economic empowerment; and water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) programming.

Over the past 37 years, World Vision's work in the WASH sector has grown exponentially. With more than 1,000 technical WASH staff members guiding our work in 60 countries, World Vision has emerged a leader in its global commitment to accelerate universal and equitable access to WASH services under UN Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 6. Over the last ten years alone, we have reached nearly 34.6 million people with clean water, 25.5 million with improved sanitation, and 40.3 million with hygiene promotion.

## WASH in healthcare facilities

Basic WASH services in healthcare facilities play an important role in preventing infections, improving the quality of healthcare, and saving lives. WASH services also are essential for safe and resilient response to disease outbreaks such as the COVID-19 pandemic and Ebola epidemic. With the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) targeting universal access to WASH services and health coverage, far greater attention is required to address the WASH service needs in healthcare facilities. Without basic WASH services, the universal health coverage targets of SDG 3 (good health and well-being) cannot be achieved—particularly the goals of increasing safe childbirth and decreasing under-5 mortality.

World Vision began emphasizing WASH in healthcare facilities in 2016. In March 2018, the UN secretary-general made a global call to action for WASH in all healthcare facilities, noting that healthcare facilities are essential for reducing disease. However, without basic WASH services, they can contribute to more infections and preventable deaths for mothers and babies.

In response to this call, World Vision and its partners scaled up WASH activities in healthcare facilities.

Between 2016 and 2025, World Vision reached:

- 5,648 healthcare facilities with basic water services
- 2,868 healthcare facilities with basic sanitation services
- 10,520 healthcare facilities with basic hygiene services

In World Vision's current five-year [global WASH business plan \(2026-2030\)](#), we have committed to reach 3,038 clinics with water, 3,398 with handwashing facilities, and 2,727 with sanitation services.

World Vision is uniquely positioned to be a major contributor globally to address the critical gap of quality WASH services in healthcare facilities because of our extensive expertise in both health and WASH, our expansive global footprint, and our long-term commitment to communities.

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**World Vision's distinctives**

Some of World Vision's distinctives that enable us to be ideal implementers for WASH in healthcare facilities work are:

- **Extensive experience:** For 37 years, World Vision has provided sustainable WASH services and life-saving health programs for mothers and children, relying on a highly effective team of technical experts worldwide.
- **Global scale:** We support a network of more than 220,000 community health workers globally who are trained and equipped to focus on prevention, providing key messages to families at home and essential care to new mothers and infants.
- **Community WASH accomplishments:** In 2025, World Vision helped provide access to clean water for 2.8 million people, improve sanitation for 2.2 million, and improve hygiene for 2.8 million in urban and rural areas. Since 2016, World Vision has provided nearly 34.6 million people with sustainable access to clean water.
- **Multisectoral approach:** World Vision implements WASH in healthcare facilities alongside long-term multisectoral community development through our Area Program model. Our work in communities (including prenatal visits; counseling from community health workers; and hygiene promotion through water quality education, Community-Led Total Sanitation, and Sanitation Marketing) helps ensure that babies and parents return home to live and thrive in a safer, more hygienic environment.
- **Government partnerships:** World Vision partners with local governments through capacity building and joint implementation, from national ministries down to the district and local levels, to strengthen their WASH and health systems for sustainable services. World Vision also builds community capacity to advocate with their local governments to increase budgets to healthcare facilities and improve services.



In Mali, World Vision supported the Kolokani district to reach 100% coverage of health centers (22) with a basic water service, in partnership with local government and other stakeholders.

- **Learning agenda:** World Vision partners with local and international universities to learn from its WASH implementation and enhance its impact. Partnerships with Drexel University, Desert Research Institute, Emory University, Johns Hopkins University, the University of North Carolina,

**WASH IN HEALTHCARE FACILITIES IN MALI**

In Mali, World Vision worked closely with local government, healthcare facility management teams, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), World Health Organization (WHO), and WaterAid to improve WASH conditions in all healthcare facilities (40) in the Kolokani and Koro districts. At the end of the project, 34 healthcare facilities received the WASH package, meeting Mali government and WHO Water and Sanitation for Health Facility Improvement Tool (WASH FIT) standards. Due to insecurity in Koro, six facilities received only a short-term WASH package and stakeholder capacity building.

Key project accomplishments:

- » In collaboration with partners, the project advocated for WASH in healthcare facilities minimum standards that were adopted by the national Ministry of Health, including an improved incinerator design.
- » Management teams and personnel from 40 healthcare facilities were trained on WHO WASH FIT and how to plan for quality improvements to reach standards and continuously assess WASH services.
- » USAID's Clean Clinic Approach was implemented in all 22 health centers in Kolokani. Results showed 82% achieved Clean Health Center status, compared to 9% at first inspection a year earlier.
- » Common WASH in healthcare facility indicators identified for the project are now being monitored at the national level, along with regular monitoring by the district and regional health services.

A project evaluation conducted by the CDC demonstrated significant improvements in water, sanitation, hygiene, waste management, and environmental cleaning, though not all WHO/ UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme basic service standards were met. Results showed 100% of health centers evaluated at endline reached the basic water service standard, up from 46% at baseline.

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and Stanford University provide expertise in technical capacity building, program evaluation, operational research, statistical analysis, and dissemination of data.

- **Diversified funding:** World Vision has a diversified funding approach and pools resources to implement WASH programming for greatest impact, including funding from government grants, private grants, child sponsorship, and mass marketing.
- **Long-term commitment:** World Vision works alongside communities for 10 to 15 years. This helps ensure communities have the knowledge and resources to keep their facilities working for many years to come.

## Integrated approaches

World Vision's minimum standards for WASH in healthcare facilities follow the basic WASH service levels detailed in the first WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Program global report on WASH in healthcare facilities.<sup>2</sup> Our approach is aligned with SDG 6 (clean water and sanitation) and SDG 3 (health and well-being). Additional best practices for WASH services in healthcare facilities are promoted by World Vision for greatest impact and long-term sustainability. These include:

- Partnering closely with government services
- Cross-sectoral coordination between WASH and health
- Behavior-change programming for healthcare workers/patients
- Partnering with other organizations for the strongest impact
- Creating demand for health services
- Establishing or strengthening operation and maintenance systems for long-term sustainability

### Partnering with government services

While the government is ultimately responsible for improved WASH services in healthcare facilities, there often is a significant gap between existing need and government capacity to ensure quality services are available and maintained. World Vision works closely with the government at all levels to help ensure it has the skills and resources necessary to carry out its role and responsibilities for the long-term.

Areas of government capacity building, advocacy, and accountability include:

- Establishing mechanisms for cross-sectoral coordination between WASH and health
- Strengthening and disseminating national policies and standards for WASH in healthcare facilities



A new mother cleans up in a handwashing basin at the Kapaapi Health Center in Uganda.

### UGANDA BABYWASH

In Uganda, resource allocation to the health sector is only 5% of the national budget. Due to the high investment needed to improve healthcare facility quality and the limited national budget, World Vision Uganda partnered with Hoima and Kikuube districts in 2018 to co-finance healthcare facility improvements in eight priority facilities. The team used an integrated approach to maximize impact through the following:

- » **Government involvement:** District health officers, inspectors, and engineers played key roles in technical oversight and guidance.
- » **Cross-sectoral coordination:** World Vision updated the community health volunteer curriculum with community members to include key messages around handwashing.
- » **Behavior-change programming:** World Vision provided informational and educational materials to improve patient and staff behavior on infection prevention and control.
- » **Partnering with other organizations:** World Vision partnered with UNICEF to mentor health workers on infection prevention and control.
- » **Creating demand:** At Kikuube Health Facility IV, deliveries increased from 40 per month to 70, and antenatal visits increased from 90 per month to 120. This is attributed to the improved quality of the healthcare facility from World Vision and government interventions.
- » **Strengthening operations:** World Vision has a memorandum of understanding with the district government to define roles and responsibilities for long-term maintenance.

<sup>2</sup> WHO/UNICEF, 2019. WASH in health care facilities: global baseline 2019 report.

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- Improving and increasing budgeting for healthcare facility staff, cleaning supplies, maintenance, and improvements
- Developing and implementing improvement action plans for each healthcare facility
- Developing a reliable and sustainable operation and maintenance system for WASH in each healthcare facility
- Monitoring key indicators on WASH service quality standards in each healthcare facility
- Establishing mechanisms for effective governance and accountability, including building community advocacy capabilities and user feedback mechanisms

### Cross-sectoral coordination

In addition to engaging primary stakeholders and local businesses in WASH in healthcare facility projects, it is important for design, implementation, and sustainability planning be done jointly between the health and WASH sectors. Within government, it is common to see an absence of effective coordination and communication between the WASH and health sectors at both the national and local levels, or lack of a strategy to ensure quality WASH service as part of the overall healthcare system.

Thus, World Vision plays an important role in bringing stakeholders together to clarify responsibilities for providing continuous, sustainable, and high-quality WASH services in healthcare facilities. We also help ensure key infection prevention and control measures do not fall through the cracks due to poor communication between government ministries. One successful approach has been to establish a national-level WASH in healthcare facility working group or task force with other national and international partners that meets regularly to discuss projects and learnings, best practices, and challenges.

### Hygiene behavior change

Infrastructure development and capacity building can enable healthy behaviors. However, behavior change approaches are a critical component to achieving the goal of quality WASH services in healthcare facilities because they help ensure the safe, effective, and sustainable use of services provided, changing norms that can transform communities and enable achievement of health and well-being. Improving the hygiene behavior of health workers, along with patients and visitors, can tremendously improve overall health outcomes. Ensuring adequate hygiene at healthcare facilities minimizes the risk of infection for patients and their families, health workers, and surrounding communities.

Thus, healthcare workers need to be trained on safe hygiene, including infection prevention and control standards and practices. Handwashing promotion is necessary for the staff to change behavior and use hand-washing facilities appropriately. WHO recommends using a varied approach to improving hand hygiene, centered on evaluation and feedback, workplace

reminders, and developing a climate of institutional safety. World Vision also works to improve healthcare facility medical waste handling/disposal and environmental cleaning practices by targeting behavior change trainings for facility cleaners.



A mother and her baby participated in the Uganda BabyWASH project.

In addition, the healthcare facility is often the key touchpoint for community health workers and the women they work with. Therefore, hygiene messages for a WASH-safe birth are included in prenatal care visits to ensure mothers understand their options for delivery and are prepared to reduce risk of infection during birth. Hygienic messages around handwashing, baby feces management, and clean play spaces should be inserted into the postnatal care visit curriculum to ensure both mothers and babies have the proper hygienic environment to grow and thrive.

### Partnering with other organizations

Partnering with other organizations is essential not only to ensure that World Vision is not duplicating efforts, but also to effectively leverage nongovernmental organization and government efforts to help address critical gaps. With typical vertical funding arrangements in the development sector, it may not be possible to implement all best practices in a healthcare facility due to limited project budget or scope. Therefore, implementers should conduct a partner and stakeholder analysis to see who else is working in the area. By partnering with other sectors in one's own organization, or with other organizations altogether, gaps in grant programming can be filled through joint efforts. This consortium-style approach enhances local relationships for sustainability and ensures all best practice interventions are considered as often as possible. Participation and leadership in national WASH-sector working groups are helpful in this regard, along with a quality landscape analysis.

### Creating demand for health services

World Vision also strengthens community systems to promote social and behavioral norms, improve health and nutrition practices, enhance accountability and governance, and address

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barriers families are facing to access healthcare. World Vision’s maternal, newborn, and child health programs are a central element of its global health strategy to build government and community capacity in health promotion and prevention. The life cycle approach promotes care for mothers and children from pregnancy through delivery, the immediate postnatal period, and throughout childhood, with attention focused on the first 1,000 days of life.

World Vision uses community health worker-centered approaches to improve the health and reduce mortality rates of children 0 to 59 months of age by improving health worker skills, strengthening health systems, and improving family and community practices. World Vision strengthens community approaches to supporting mothers and children by establishing community health committees, mother support groups, and “peer mothers” who help with breastfeeding and early infant nutrition.



*World Vision promotes these WHO practical steps to improve and sustain WASH services in healthcare facilities.*

### Operation and maintenance systems for sustainability

Beyond ensuring that improved infrastructure is available and usable, and that staff members are empowered to develop appropriate WASH-related behaviors, quality WASH in healthcare facilities requires establishing reliable operation and maintenance systems to ensure the sustainability of health-related benefits.

Essential operation and maintenance components that must be in place for continuous provision of quality WASH services in healthcare facilities include:

- Adequate budget for staff, cleaning supplies, and system repairs when needed (including government funding and community cost sharing)
- Sufficient human resources, including health workers and cleaners
- Management structure to ensure maintenance and prompt repair of infrastructure as needed
- Supervision that includes regular monitoring of quality standards, including consistent cleaning according to protocols
- Reliable supply chain for cleaning supplies, such as soap for handwashing as well as disinfectant and detergent for environmental cleaning

### WHO practical steps

World Vision teams designing WASH in healthcare facility programs are encouraged to use the WASH in Health Care Facilities Practical Steps to Achieve Universal Access to Quality Care<sup>3</sup> (see image above) to develop program designs. Where World Vision is working in consortium, the steps we are traditionally the most well-positioned to lead on are:

- **Situational analysis:** based on our experience with the Emory WASH Conditions Assessment Tool and WHO WASH FIT
- **Improving infrastructure:** due to our long track-record of sustainable infrastructure development
- **Monitoring and collecting data:** based on our long-term presence in communities and engagement with community health workers and health staff
- **Engaging communities:** due to our high level of trust with communities built over many years of interaction

For more information on WASH programming, the latest business plan and recent updates, please visit our digital platform:

[mappingthebluethread.global](https://mappingthebluethread.global)



<sup>3</sup> WHO/UNICEF, 2019. WASH in Health Care Facilities Practical Steps to Achieve Universal Access to Quality Care.

