

How WASH delivers: Just the facts

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Water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) remain a critical part of integrated and intersectoral approaches to realize women and girls' health and rights, and improve sustainable development outcomes for communities around the world. This is recognized by Sustainable Development Goal 6 and the commitment to universal access to safe drinking water and sanitation for all by 2030. Though a majority of the world's population continues to lack access to safely managed sanitation and 1 in 9 people don't have access to clean water close to home,¹ official development assistance water-related funding commitments dropped by 25% from 2012 to 2016 according to the United Nations 2018 Sustainable Development Goals Report.² Renewed leadership from governments around the world is critically needed to prioritize WASH as a fundamental driver of sustainable development.

WASH in health care facilitates

896 million people globally have no water service at their healthcare facility and more than 1.5 billion people globally have no sanitation service at their healthcare facility.³

On May 25th, 2019, a resolution for WASH in healthcare facilities was unanimously passed at the 72nd Session of the World Health Assembly.

WASH is part of prevention

An estimated 30,000 women and 400,000 babies worldwide die every year from infections such as puerperal sepsis, often caused by lack of water, sanitation and poor hand-washing practices.⁴

WASH has the potential to prevent at least 9.1% of the global disease burden and 6.3% of all deaths.⁵

Women's agency and leadership

When women participate in decision-making on WASH services, their rights to water and sanitation are more likely to be fulfilled through services that are accessible, safe and affordable.¹⁰



Women's health

Women are the main users of health services, the primary caregivers and make up the majority of frontline healthcare providers in many countries around the world.⁶ Poor WASH in healthcare facilities disproportionately impacts women and places them at increased risk of infections.

Women's economic empowerment and equal opportunity

Universal access to WASH in sub-Saharan Africa would give women and girls back 40 billion hours per year that they currently spend on water collection for their families.⁸

WASH in schools increases student attendance, contributes to dignity, respect and gender equality and significantly reduces hygiene-related disease.⁹

Reduced gender-based violence

Access to WASH services closer to home means that women and girls avoid sexual and gender-based violence on long journeys to collect water and access sanitation facilities.⁷

CANADA'S OPPORTUNITY FOR GLOBAL LEADERSHIP

In fiscal year 2017—18, Canada spent \$97.02 million (CAD) on water and sanitation in international assistance.¹¹ This represents roughly 1.6% of Canada's international assistance spending and a decline in spending over 2016—17 when Canada spent \$127.03 million (CAD) or 2.27% of international assistance on water and sanitation.¹²

It is time for Canada to renew its commitment to WASH that delivers for women and girls. Canada's legacy should include integrated and gender responsive approaches for sanitation, menstrual hygiene and water access across health, education, economic empowerment investments and efforts to reduce gender-based violence. Such approaches empower people and communities and have significant potential to improve the effectiveness of programming.

WASH HELPS DELIVER GENDER RESPONSIVE HEALTH SYSTEM AND SERVICES

The challenge

Despite being a fundamental component of health systems and critical for realizing the health of women and girls, WASH services are too often neglected and under-prioritized by governments and development partners. In 2018, the United Nations Secretary General issued a Global Call to Action to elevate the importance of WASH in healthcare facilities and prioritize action here.

Building our movement

- Ensure WASH is incorporated into health programmes and financing platforms, such as those related to maternal and newborn health, sexual and reproductive health and rights and Universal Health Coverage (UHC).
- Invest in WASH in healthcare facilities through a health system strengthening approach, addressing infrastructure, governance, service provision, gender equality and behaviour change.
- Support collaboration involving WASH, gender and health stakeholders (national and local government, civil society organizations) to strengthen multi-sectoral institutional coordination to plan for, implement and monitor the integration of gender-responsive approaches to WASH in health system strengthening efforts.

WASH DELIVERS ON EFFORTS TO REDUCE GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

The challenge

The daily task of collecting water and the lack of adequate and gender-responsive sanitation services puts women and girls at risk of harassment or sexual and gender-based violence when they have to travel long distances to fetch water, use shared toilets or have no alternative to practicing open defecation. WASH and gender equality experts agree that improving WASH services can help reduce the risk of harassment and sexual and gender-based violence experienced by women and girls in contexts where these services are lacking or inadequate.

Building our movement

- Support leadership and decision making by women and girls in the planning and delivery of WASH services, ensuring that WASH facilities are built appropriately and in safe locations to meet the needs of women and girls.
- Ensure that WASH policies and programs prioritize the safety of women and girls and that programs aimed at reducing violence against women address WASH-related factors.
- Champion a global movement to address WASH-related violence as a part of efforts aimed at reducing sexual and gender-based violence.

WASH DELIVERS ON WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT AND EQUAL OPPORTUNITY

The challenge

The burden of unpaid work falls disproportionately on women and girls, particularly the duty of water collection. In schools, girls continue to face a lack of appropriate WASH facilities, critical to supporting menstrual health and hygiene. Women's access to decent work is negatively impacted by a lack of suitable WASH facilities and insufficient support for menstrual hygiene management in the workplace.

Building our movement

- Invest in WASH in homes and communities through approaches that include women in the planning, design and monitoring of services to reduce the burden of unpaid work.
- Address inadequate WASH provisions in schools through a comprehensive approach that includes the establishment of appropriate water and sanitation facilities and promotion of positive hygiene behaviours.
- Integrate WASH in efforts to lower and eliminate perceived and actual barriers to quality girls' education, including prioritising interventions to promote menstrual health.
- Include WASH issues as part of efforts to promote women's economic participation and partner with the private sector and development stakeholders, to improve the availability of appropriate WASH facilities in places of employment.

1. World Health Organization and the United Nations Children's Fund. 2017. Progress on drinking water, sanitation and hygiene: 2017 update and SDG Baselines. Joint Monitoring Programme. Geneva: WHO and UNICEF. https://www.unicef.org/publications/index_96611.html

2. The report is available at <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2018>.

3. World Health Organization and the United Nations Children's Fund. 2019. *WASH in healthcare facilities: Global Baseline Report 2019*. Geneva: WHO and UNICEF.

4. World Health Organization. 2017. "Forgetting to wash your hands can cost lives." <https://www.who.int/news-room/feature-stories/detail/forgetting-to-wash-your-hands-can-cost-lives>

5. Prüss-Ustün, A., Bos, R., Gore, F., and Bartram, J. 2008. *Safer water, better health: costs, benefits and sustainability of interventions to protect and promote health*. Geneva: WHO.

6. George, A. 2008. Nurses, community health workers and home carers: gendered human resources compensating for skewed health systems. *Global Public Health* 3 (1): 75-89.

7. See WEDC/Loughborough University, n.d. "Violence, Gender & WASH." <http://violence-wash.lboro.ac.uk/>. See also House, S., Ferron, S., Sommer, M., and Cavill, S. 2014. "Violence, Gender, & WASH: Making water, sanitation and hygiene safer through improved programming and services." *A Practitioner's Toolkit*. London: WaterAid/SHARE.

8. Goetz, A.M., Cueva-Beteta, H., Eddon, R., Sandler, J., Doraid, M., Bhandarkar, M., Anwar, S., and Dayal, A. 2009. *Progress of World's Women. Who Answers to Women? Gender and Accountability*. New York: UNIFEM.

9. United Nations Children's Fund. 2014. *Maintaining the Momentum: Advancing Health, Learning and Equity through WASH in Schools*. New York: United Nations.

10. Jansz, S., and Wilbur, J. 2013. Women and WASH. *Briefing Note*. Water Supply & Sanitation Collaborative Council and WaterAid.

11. Includes official development assistance and other official flows. Global Affairs Canada. 2019. Statistical Report on International Assistance – Fiscal Year 2017-2018. Ottawa: Government of Canada. <https://www.international.gc.ca/gac-amc/assets/pdfs/publications/sria-rsai-2017-18-en.pdf>

12. Statistical reports on international assistance are available for 2012—13 to 2017—18 at <https://www.international.gc.ca/gac-amc/publications/odaaa-lrmado/sria-rsai.aspx?lang=eng>.