

EVENT SNAPSHOT

Scaling Up WASH Services in a Pandemic Seminar Series: Part 4 – A Health Systems-Strengthening Approach to Improve WASH in Health Care Facilities

Event Details

Date and Time

23 June, 3:00–4:00 p.m.

Venue

MS Teams

Related water subthemes (based on Water Advisory Teams)

x	Water supply, sanitation, and wastewater		Flood/drought risk management and resilience
	Irrigation and productivity		Water governance and finance
	IWRM, storage, water-food-energy nexus	x	Water and health

WASH is a critical part of infection prevention and control. Despite this, one in four health care facilities lacks basic water services and 896 million people seek care at facilities with no water service, according to the WASH in Health Care Facilities 2019 report by the WHO and UNICEF.

Without these fundamentals in health care settings at all points of care, quality of care will not be achieved. WaterAid has continuously been programming and advocating for increased action and integration of WASH in health care facilities.

In the last seminar of the series, which gathered about 40 participants, Alison Macintyre and Vanita Suneja of WaterAid presented on:

- (i) a health systems-strengthening approach to improve WASH in health care facilities;
- (ii) hand and environmental hygiene behavior change in health care facilities; and
- (iii) how WASH links to health security and antimicrobial resistance.

They also highlighted the progression of WASH interventions in the global level, particularly noting the milestone of the 2019 approval of the WASH in health care facilities resolution at the World Health Assembly. Among others, it calls on countries to establish a national roadmap and targets to implement WASH in health care facilities and infection prevention and control standards.

Key Takeaways

The WASH gap in health care facilities is not just an infrastructure problem. WaterAid's approach goes beyond infrastructure and examines determinants driving the inadequate WASH services from the individual level to the system level. This can include the motivation and skills of care providers and cleaners, as well as the procedures of the health care organization. A health system strengthening approach has many benefits, not the least of which is reducing the risk of neonatal and maternal mortality.

Sustainable change needs patience, persistence, pragmatism, and patience. There is no one single approach, and an approach must be framed within health priorities of the local context. Periodic analysis of situation is also needed to inform strategy. For example in South Asia, in some cases there is a lack of standards in health care facilities, while in others there are guidelines but there is no implementation. In India, to help implement guidelines, the patient welfare committee was leveraged to conduct trainings on the importance of WASH in health care facilities and to make other WASH-related improvements.

To mitigate the long-term impacts of COVID-19 on global public health, joint delivery of hygiene and immunization services can scale up benefits. This is because immunization programs reach more people than any other health intervention. In Nepal, the government is scaling up the delivery of the rotavirus vaccine nationwide. WaterAid is providing technical support to integrate COVID-19 messages in all 77 districts, led by the Family Welfare Division.

Coordination is indispensable. This entails both formal and informal means of collaboration between health and WASH stakeholders, as well as working with other government agencies, research institutions, UN agencies, training institutes, and multilateral development banks for financing.

“One of the key components is coordination, which is not simple, but it is necessary.”

— Alison Macintyre, WaterAid Australia

About the Speakers

Alison Macintyre

Technical Lead for Health, WaterAid Australia

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Alison has led WaterAid Australia’s strategy, policy, research, and programming on the intersection of water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) with human health since 2013. She supports health-related research, programming, and policy work in the Southeast Asia and Pacific regions and contributes to WaterAid’s global policy and advocacy. Her main areas of focus are WASH in healthcare facilities, maternal and newborn health, quality universal health coverage, nutrition, and antimicrobial resistance. Between 2015 and 2018, Alison was seconded to the World Health Organization headquarters in Geneva to support the Global Action Plan on WASH in healthcare facilities. She holds a BS and BSc from Latrobe University and a BSc (Honors) and Master of Public Health from the University of Melbourne.

Vanita Suneja

Regional Advocacy Manager, WaterAid South Asia

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Vanita has over 25 years of experience in the development sector. She has been working on a wide range of issues including water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH), small holder agriculture, forest governance, rural livelihoods, women’s land rights, renewable energy, climate change, extractives and mining. She is currently leading the policy and advocacy work with WaterAid at the South Asia regional level. Prior to WaterAid, Vanita worked with Oxfam India and the Society for Promotion of

Wastelands Development in New Delhi. She holds a master's degree in Forestry Management from the Indian Institute of Forest Management in Bhopal.

Related Resources

[WASH in Health Care Facilities: Global Baseline Report 2019](#)

[World Health Assembly 72.7 Resolution: Water, sanitation and hygiene in health care facilities](#)