



UN
2023 WATER
CONFERENCE

NEW YORK
22-24
MARCH
2023

UN 2023 Water Conference Side Event

Water, sanitation, and hygiene as a driver of improved health

Wednesday 22 March, 11:00-12:15, UNHQ Conference Room 7

Organized by: World Health Organization, Government of India, Gouvernement Français, Government of Ethiopia, UNICEF, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, WaterAid and The World Bank

Background on the event

The side event explored how the drinking-water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) and health sectors can work together to improve health and achieve shared aims. Safe drinking-water, sanitation, and hygiene are fundamental to health and well-being, yet at least 2 billion people rely on faecally contaminated water sources for drinking globally. In 2019, inadequate WASH caused 1.4 million deaths and 74 million disability adjusted life years (DALYs) from diarrhoea, acute respiratory infections, undernutrition and soil-transmitted helminthiasis. Participants shared the latest evidence on the linkages between WASH and health, highlighted the role of the health sector in WASH, and shared experiences of successful partnerships and actions to accelerate progress and ultimately reduce the WASH-related health burden. The event included two panels, one with government representatives and another with WASH development partners, and featured discussions on topics such as cholera, anti-microbial resistance (AMR), neglected tropical diseases (NTDs) and climate change.

Water Action Agenda

WHO committed to accelerate the professionalization of water supply and sanitation services through capacity building, including in regulation, to dramatically improve water, sanitation, and hygiene in communities and health care facilities. The commitment aims to strengthen the capacity of water and sanitation regulators, accelerate efforts to improve WASH in healthcare facilities, and promote risk management approaches such as water and sanitation safety planning. The commitment will rely on the combined programming of WHO and its country offices, in-country stakeholders, and NGOs/INGOs. The aim is to contribute to

improved public health outcomes, reduced incidence of WASH-related diseases, and improved access to safe drinking-water and sanitation. Deliverables include a strengthened WHO-led International Network of Drinking-water and Sanitation Regulators (RegNet) and a WHO-led climate resilient health infrastructure Global Taskforce. Full commitment text: <https://sdgs.un.org/partnerships/accelerating-professionalized-water-supply-and-sanitation-services-through-capacity>

Key Issues discussed (5- 8 bullet points)

- WASH is a concern of the health sector, and health is a concern of the WASH sector.
- The importance of WASH in healthcare facilities was emphasized. Without WASH in healthcare facilities, there is not health care.
- AMR has huge costs for health systems, but WASH is often overlooked in national AMR plans.
- Recent progress on cholera has been undermined by a surge of outbreaks that are becoming larger and deadlier. Climate change worsens the situation.
- Government representatives spoke of the critical factors for WASH progress: greater or improved political will, public spending, partnerships, and a people-centered approach.
- WASH development partners discussed the importance of engaging government leadership and achieving safely managed sanitation. Strong data systems, accountability, coordination mechanisms, and partnerships are necessary.
- WASH and health systems are complex but a critical element is ensuring the capacity of WASH and healthcare staff, respectively, to work in an integrated and collaborative manner.
- The importance of building climate resilience in WASH for health, supporting the dignity of sanitation workers, mobilizing resources for WASH and health systems, and improving public policy and efficient use of public money.

Key recommendations for action (5 - 6 bullet points)

- Strengthen partnerships between WASH and health at all levels – global, regional, national, and sub-national.
- Continue to address and prioritize WASH in healthcare facilities.
- Support integration of WASH into national AMR plans and prioritize WASH as the only long-term solution for cholera.
- Engage government leadership and build political will, working through a systems-based approaches for WASH and health, with government in the lead but partnering closely with local utilities and ministries from relevant sectors.
- Build demand for sanitation and hygiene, prioritize hygiene as a service in its own right, and continually track progress towards national WASH standards.
- Increase public spending on WASH and reduce fragmented or siloed approaches so as to better address climate change-related challenges and improve resilience of WASH infrastructure.