

Accelerating Action on Hygiene and Health for All

For centuries society has seen that good hygiene and health conditions save and improve lives. Research and innovation continue to advance knowledge and approaches, but the importance of basic hygiene practices remains fundamental. This has been even more evident during the pandemic caused by the Coronavirus (COVID-19). The collaboration between Essity and Water Supply and Sanitation Collaborative Council (WSSCC) aims to bring much needed insights, evidence and solutions to the societal and political debate, in order to advance hygiene and health standards and practices around the world.

It is time to accelerate action to improve global health and well-being by prioritizing hygiene and health for all.

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In the up-coming Hygiene and Health Report 2020-2021 Essity and WSSCC partner to put focus on hygiene and health issues. The pandemic has indeed underlined the importance of hygiene and health in our lives. How is this reflected in the report?

Magnus: We are highlighting two themes in the upcoming report: how hygiene and health can improve and save lives and how all of us collectively can contribute to more inclusive societies. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted that millions of women, men and children face obstacles in their daily lives due to basic hygiene and health-related constraints. The right actions can improve hygiene and health conditions globally and benefit both individuals and society.

Sue: The COVID-19 pandemic is also a wake-up call to re-focus on what is essential for preventive health. The pandemic has underlined the importance of the fundamental practices learned since childhood, such as handwashing with soap, in promoting basic hygiene to combating infections all around the world. It is also times like these where we appreciate well-resourced and competent health services and count on them to save lives.

Magnus: I agree, the time for prioritizing and investing in hygiene and health is certainly now. The humanitarian, economic and social consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic are obviously to be seen. One thing is for sure: improved hygiene and health standards as well as awareness and education will be more important than ever.

Essity and the WSSCC have partnered since 2014 and both entities have been working on global hygiene and health issues for decades. What is the added value of collaborating and what role do the UN SDGs play?

Sue: The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provide an opportunity to accelerate progress on some of the world's most critical issues: poverty, education, health, sanitation and hygiene, gender equality, etc. We know that many of these issues are cross-cutting, and that addressing them in silos hasn't worked in the past. The SDGs are a call to action to stakeholders from all

backgrounds: governments, UN, civil society, academia, private sector to work together to collectively implement solutions that benefit society and our planet. We continue to work with Essity to suggest actions, provide evidence and amplify messages, especially in the dialogue with key decision-makers.

Magnus: The SDGs create a structure for driving actions and partnerships are critical to success. As a UN-hosted entity WSSCC supports programs on the ground and collaborate broadly across sectors to accelerate progress on sanitation and hygiene at national, regional and global levels.

Sue: Essity brings power of innovation as well as customer and market knowledge for hygiene and health solutions. They are an ethical international business leader with a person-centered approach to research and development. With their network of professionals around the world they can reach audiences and question social norms. It is essential for large-scale progress on these issues, and we feel that our complementarity as partners strengthens our work.

What needs to be done and who should act?

Sue: The basic requirements to achieve good hygiene and health conditions are universal and the actions must be at all levels: individual, community, national, regional and global. We now need to work together to ensure policies that continuously drive an inclusive public health approach that focuses on prevention. Concrete preventive actions need to be planned for, prioritized, financed and implemented everywhere for the benefit of everyone.

Magnus: There is a renewed opportunity to prioritize hygiene and health for all, and the suggested calls to action for policy makers are outlined in the full report. We continue to advance knowledge and facilitate solutions in order to support more inclusive societies and break barriers to health and well-being. We invite you to take part in this important mission.



Calls for action

There are several global challenges related to hygiene and health. We have chosen to focus on the issues where progress needs to escalate, for example SDG 6 has seen progress on water issues globally but sanitation and hygiene are still lagging even basic targets. We ask policy makers to consider the following calls for action:

- **Put people first.** The needs of the individual should always be at the center of public policy to secure the human right for basic hygiene and health for everyone. In health care, the individual needs must be reflected in the provisions to both care taker and care giver. Access to clean water, safe, clean and private hygiene and sanitation facilities, essential sanitary products for all is key, supported by information and training.
- **Establish a prevention agenda.** Each country should establish actions to improve hygiene, health and sanitation as a fundamental prevention agenda. Investment in preventive actions such as handwashing can reduce additional healthcare costs, improve productivity and save lives. Research has found that for example a national handwashing behavior change program would provide a 35-fold return on investment in China, and a 92-fold return in India. National statistics, and aggregated global statistics, should be calculated to show the social, clinical, economic and environmental effects of working preventively.
- **Invest in hygiene and health.** Prioritize and adequately fund hygiene and health policies – especially supporting people at different stages of life or those in vulnerable situations. These investments create shared value in terms of individual, care provider and societal gains. Support and fund research in these areas is also important to understand where the gaps or areas for improvement are.
- **Secure ownership.** Often hygiene issues are everyone's business yet nobody's business. Clear ownership is needed, as well as accountability. Prioritization and appropriate financing are key to improve global hygiene and to realize that shared value will require ownership from policy makers.
- **Improve hygiene and health standards.** Stakeholders at local, national and global level, should work together to establish and implement hygiene and health practices, guidelines and standards. These must be supported by education and training for users, caretakers etc. Innovation and digitalization within the sector provide disruptive opportunities for progress.
- **Shift behaviors and social norms.** Effective hygiene and health practices often come from shifting behaviors and social norms, which involves a long-term commitment from all of us. To be successful, special attention and increased support in national policies and budgets is required. The silence and taboos on issues such as menstruation, incontinence and other stigmatizing conditions needs to be broken.





By implementing these calls to action, improvements in hygiene and health will be accessible for individuals at different stages of life, regardless of gender, race or abilities. Society will be better prepared for infections, viruses and other challenges. The shared value of prioritizing hygiene and health will bring economic, societal and individual gains.

Exchanging information and knowledge with other relevant stakeholders is essential to Essity and WSSCC. We look forward to continued discussions and invite you to join our mission through activities related to our Hygiene and Health Report 2020-2021.

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