Water for Women is the Australian Government’s flagship Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) program aimed at improving the health, gender equality and wellbeing of Asian and Pacific communities through inclusive, sustainable WASH. Research is an important element of Water for Women, it is a key pathway for development innovation and helps to inform policy-making and program delivery.

Inadequate hygiene during childbirth and post-natal care has been linked with increased neonatal and maternal mortality and increases in preventable infections. Addressing hygiene during childbirth and the post-natal period is a priority for the global development community and plays a fundamental part of achieving the Water for Women fund outcomes.

Lead by the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine (LSHTM) with collaborators at WaterAid Cambodia, and Royal Government of Cambodia’s National Institute of Public Health (NIPH), this research project will look to Change Hygiene Around Maternal Priorities (CHAMP) in Cambodia.
Adequate hygiene – including hand hygiene – is the cornerstone of modern infection prevention and control strategies.

In Cambodia, infection prevention and control (IPC) and improved hygiene practices are key to improving maternal and neonatal health. While supported by a robust evidence base and standard, global guidelines, IPC and hand hygiene behaviours remain inadequate.

Little is known of the specific challenges and opportunities for improving hand hygiene within Cambodian Health Care Facilities (HCFs) and how to adequately address those through robust behaviour-focused interventions. There is also limited knowledge on how existing institutional and social structures may interact with these challenges and opportunities.

This project will follow the innovative Behaviour Centred Design approach. This partnership will systematically document current hygiene practices, motives and environments at both HCFs and in the home, paying special attention to understand existing gender norms and roles in Cambodia.

The objectives of this research project are to:

1. Document existing hygiene practices during labour, delivery, post-natal care, and the domestic environment during the first 48 hours of life.
2. Understand the cognitive, emotional, reactive, and habitual drivers of current hygiene behaviours.
3. Utilise findings to inform the participatory co-development of candidate intervention strategies with mothers and HC staff.
4. Determine the feasibility and acceptability of newly developed intervention strategies by implementing in a limited number of HCFs over a 4 to 6-month period.

Qualitative and quantitative methods will be used to develop a robust baseline assessment of behaviours and drivers (Objectives 1 and 2) in six primary health centres and two referral hospitals.

Key findings will inform the rapid prototyping and iterative improvement of a multimodal behaviour-change intervention delivered through existing health care facilities to improve hygiene behaviours along the continuum of care, for mothers and babies, while improving women’s control of their own health. The final intervention will be implemented in half of the original facilities and changes in hygiene and IPC compared against baseline measures and facilities that are not receiving the intervention.

Water for Women is proud to be partnering with the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, WaterAid, and NIPH in this important research work.

Investments in research facilitate access to diverse partnerships and networks, contributing to Australia’s aid policy and wider diplomatic engagement with our partner countries.

Australia believes that equitable WASH access is of crucial importance to develop communities. Water for Women and our partners provide innovative solutions to WASH delivery and use research to contribute evidence to the global WASH sector. By working together and building evidence, we can create better, more sustainable WASH outcomes whilst also contributing to strengthened gender equality and inclusion.

WaterAid, with the Ministry of Health and partners, has been working to transform health care through better water, sanitation and hygiene during childbirth. While improving water and sanitation services has been successful in several health centres, changing hygiene behaviour remains a challenge. Through this research, we will test new approaches to improving handwashing behaviour during labor, delivery, and the immediate after birth while addressing the inequitable care burden placed on new mothers.”

WaterAid