

**“My dream is to eradicate  
obstetric fistula from  
Ethiopia. I won’t achieve  
this in my lifetime, but you  
can in yours.”**

*Dr Catherine Hamlin AC*

**Catherine Hamlin  
Fistula Foundation**



# What is Obstetric Fistula?

One of the worst things that can happen to a woman or girl is an obstetric fistula - an internal injury caused by a prolonged, unrelieved obstructed labour. A fistula is a hole between the birth canal and the bladder or rectum. It leaves survivors leaking urine or faeces, and sometimes both.

93% of obstetric fistula survivors give birth to a stillborn baby. If that wasn't horrific enough, these women are ostracised and pushed to the edge of their society - forgotten and invisible.

**With access to quality maternal health care, this horrific childbirth injury is entirely preventable.**

# The Hamlin Model of Care

The Hamlin Model of Care is grounded in a fundamental respect for the patient and a strong commitment to provide complete and compassionate care. Based on Dr Catherine Hamlin's core values, the model remains central to the organisation's ethos today.

**Surgical Repair**



**Rehabilitation**



**Reintegration**



**Counselling**



## Dr Catherine Hamlin

Founded over 60 years ago, by pioneering Australian surgeons Drs Catherine and Reg Hamlin, Hamlin Fistula Ethiopia has treated more than 60,000 Ethiopian women who have suffered the most horrific childbirth injury - obstetric fistula.



On the evening of their arrival in Ethiopia in 1959, a fellow gynaecologist said, “The fistula patients will break your hearts.” And indeed they did.

These pioneering doctors from Australia never left Ethiopia. Instead, Catherine and Reg committed their lives to Ethiopian women and to improving maternal health in the country they called home.

After Reg’s death in 1993, Catherine refused to leave. She stayed on and pioneered the way in providing complete treatment for women suffering with a fistula. Surgical repair, counselling, rehabilitation and reintegration all form elements of Catherine’s world leadership in best practice treatment, known as the ‘Hamlin Model of Care’.

Today, Hamlin Fistula Ethiopia is a health care network of over 550 Ethiopian staff servicing six hospitals, Desta Mender rehabilitation centre, the Hamlin College of Midwives and over 80 Hamlin supported Midwifery Clinics.

**Hamlin is the reference organisation and leader in the fight to eradicate obstetric fistula around the world, blazing a trail for holistic treatment and care that empowers women to reassert their humanity, secure their health and well-being, and regain their roles in their families and communities.**

Catherine passed away at age 96 in March, 2020. As Catherine planned, Ethiopian professionals - many trained by Catherine - have for some time been appointed to all major roles at Hamlin to ensure continuity well into the future. Hamlin Fistula Ethiopia will not stop until Catherine’s dream comes true. Until fistula is eradicated from Ethiopia. Forever.

## Treatment:

# Restoring Health and Dignity

An obstetric fistula can usually be repaired with a single life-changing surgery.

**“This life changing surgery restores their health and dignity.”** *Oprah Winfrey*

The Hamlin clinical team is globally renowned for its treatment technique. Surgeons from all over the world have trained at Hamlin to learn this acclaimed best practice for fistula surgery.

In addition to Hamlin’s Addis Ababa Fistula Hospital, Hamlin established five regional fistula hospitals throughout Ethiopia to ensure access for women in the most remote areas. All six Hamlin hospitals also provide a birthing facility where former patients can return for a safe caesarean section delivery, free of charge, thanks to generous supporters.

The Hamlin Model of Care ensures the treatment for women with an obstetric fistula is focused not just on repairing the injury, but also restoring dignity. Patients coming to Hamlin Fistula Ethiopia receive a customised program that includes surgical repair, counselling, rehabilitation and reintegration.

**“We do not treat just the hole in the bladder. We treat the whole patient with love and care, literacy and numeracy classes, a new dress and money to travel home.”** *Dr Catherine Hamlin AC*



## Prevention:

### Training Local Midwives

Dr Catherine Hamlin always knew that the key to a fistula-free world was through prevention. So, in 2007, she established the Hamlin College of Midwives. The college recruits students from rural areas, puts them through a rigorous four-year degree in Midwifery, and deploys them back to their villages where their skills are most needed.

**This is a cornerstone of Catherine's vision - ensuring that women in Ethiopia have access to quality health care to prevent fistula injuries in the first place.**

Since its opening, nearly 200 Hamlin midwives have graduated from the college. They are working in over 80 Hamlin-supported Midwifery Clinics in rural areas. When a Hamlin midwife arrives, new cases of fistula drop to almost zero in nearby villages.



## Rehabilitation and Reintegration:

### Isolation to Independence

Beyond surgical treatment of fistula injuries, Hamlin Fistula Ethiopia provides extensive rehabilitation and reintegration. Fistula surgery at Hamlin is supplemented with physiotherapy and counselling to help recovering fistula patients regain their physical and mental health.

Hamlin also provides rehabilitation programs at Desta Mender, a farm and training centre established in 2002. Here women receive education in literacy, numeracy and vocational training. With the help of start-up grants facilitated by Hamlin, many women have gone on to establish their own businesses.



## **Mamitu - from fistula patient to world renowned fistula surgeon**

Dr Catherine Hamlin and Mamitu Gashe were family. They were also a formidable team for almost 60 years. Together they changed the lives of thousands of women with fistula injuries, and trained hundreds of fistula surgeons from all over the world, in their fight to eradicate obstetric fistula.

Mamitu came to the hospital as a patient in 1962 at the age of 16 with a horrific obstetric fistula injury. She was so grateful for the care she received that she decided to dedicate her life to Catherine and Reg's mission - helping other women with a fistula.

**Catherine and Reg saw something special in Mamitu. Under their skilled guidance, Mamitu went from mopping floors and comforting her fellow patients, to becoming one of the most acclaimed fistula surgeons in the world, despite never having had a day's schooling.**

In 2018, Mamitu was listed as #32 on the BBC's global list of 100 Inspirational Women.

Mamitu has a special love and empathy for the patients. Catherine use to say she saw Mamitu many times with tears in her eyes as she welcomed patients to Hamlin's Addis Ababa Fistula Hospital, where she still works and lives today.

**Mamitu's inspiring story and the lifelong friendship of Catherine and Mamitu has been captured in a book written by award-winning journalist and author Sue Williams. Learn more overleaf.**

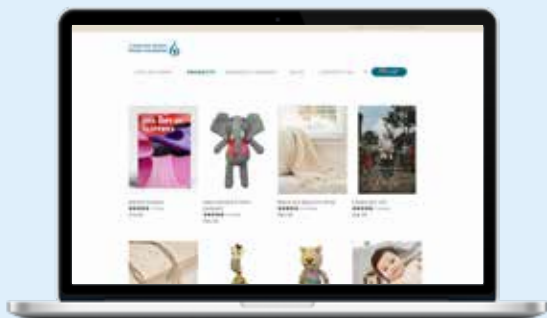


## The Hamlin Shop [store.hamlin.org.au](http://store.hamlin.org.au)

Discover our range of ethically made gifts from Africa, including products made by recovering fistula patients at Hamlin Fistula Ethiopia. Your order is packed with love by our volunteers. We offer worldwide shipping.



*Shop online today! [store.hamlin.org.au](http://store.hamlin.org.au)*



## ***Healing Lives, NEW book!***

*Healing Lives* reveals the untold tale of Mamitu Gashe, the protégée of Dr Catherine Hamlin, and the inspiring decades-long friendship between the two women.

This is a story about the power of passion, giving, and an unlikely friendship, that will capture your heart.

**Get your copy today at [store.hamlin.org.au](http://store.hamlin.org.au)**





## Eradicating Fistula by 2030

The team at Hamlin Fistula Ethiopia is committed to achieving Catherine's vision for a fistula-free Ethiopia by 2030.

Hamlin's Patient Identification Program is working to identify every last woman suffering in silence in remote areas of Ethiopia, connecting them with life changing treatment at Hamlin. We need your help.

Will you consider becoming one of our valued Hamlin monthly donors? A life-changing standard fistula operation can cost as little as \$700, so a gift of \$60 a month can pay for one within a year.

**If you would like to help in this way, call us on 02 9440 7001 or visit [hamlin.org.au/regulargiving](https://hamlin.org.au/regulargiving)**

## Your donation saves lives

**\$60** can help us locate untreated fistula sufferers

**\$700** can fund one standard fistula operation in a Hamlin regional hospital to restore a woman's life

**\$4,500** can fund a one-year scholarship for a student at the Hamlin College of Midwives



*Join our online community*

### **Catherine Hamlin Fistula Foundation**

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