

# Dr Catherine Hamlin



Founded over 60 years ago, by pioneering Australian surgeon Dr Catherine Hamlin and her surgeon husband Dr Reg Hamlin, Hamlin Fistula Ethiopia is dedicated to treating 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 care in the country they called home.

After Reg's death in 1993, Catherine refused to leave. She stayed on and developed a complete treatment for women suffering with a fistula. Surgical repair, counselling, rehabilitation and reintegration all form elements of the Hamlin Model of Care - the world's leading approach to preoperative and postoperative fistula treatment.

Today, Hamlin Fistula Ethiopia is a health care network of over 550 Ethiopian medical professionals servicing six fistula hospitals, a rehabilitation and reintegration centre, the Hamlin College of Midwives and more than 90 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 wellbeing, and regain their roles in their families and communities.**

Under Dr Catherine Hamlin's pioneering guidance, over 60,000 Ethiopian women have had their fistula injuries treated. Whilst the Hamlin team is very proud of its achievements to date, the task is nowhere near complete. It is estimated up to 31,000 Ethiopian women still live with an untreated fistula injury and new cases continue to occur.

Hamlin Fistula Ethiopia is committed to achieving Catherine's vision for a fistula-free Ethiopia - and they won't stop until it is eradicated. Forever.



## Catherine Hamlin's Journey Continues. Will You Help?

The team at Hamlin continues to carry Catherine's torch and vision. Hamlin Fistula Ethiopia have restored health and dignity to over 60,000 Ethiopian women and are working to increase the number of women's lives transformed to 100,000.

But we need your help. For as little as \$3.30 a day you can provide life-changing treatment to women in Ethiopia who have suffered devastating childbirth injuries.

Joining our community of regular givers is one of the most effective ways to support the work that Catherine started.

Will you consider becoming one of our valued Hamlin monthly donors and help find, heal and empower women?

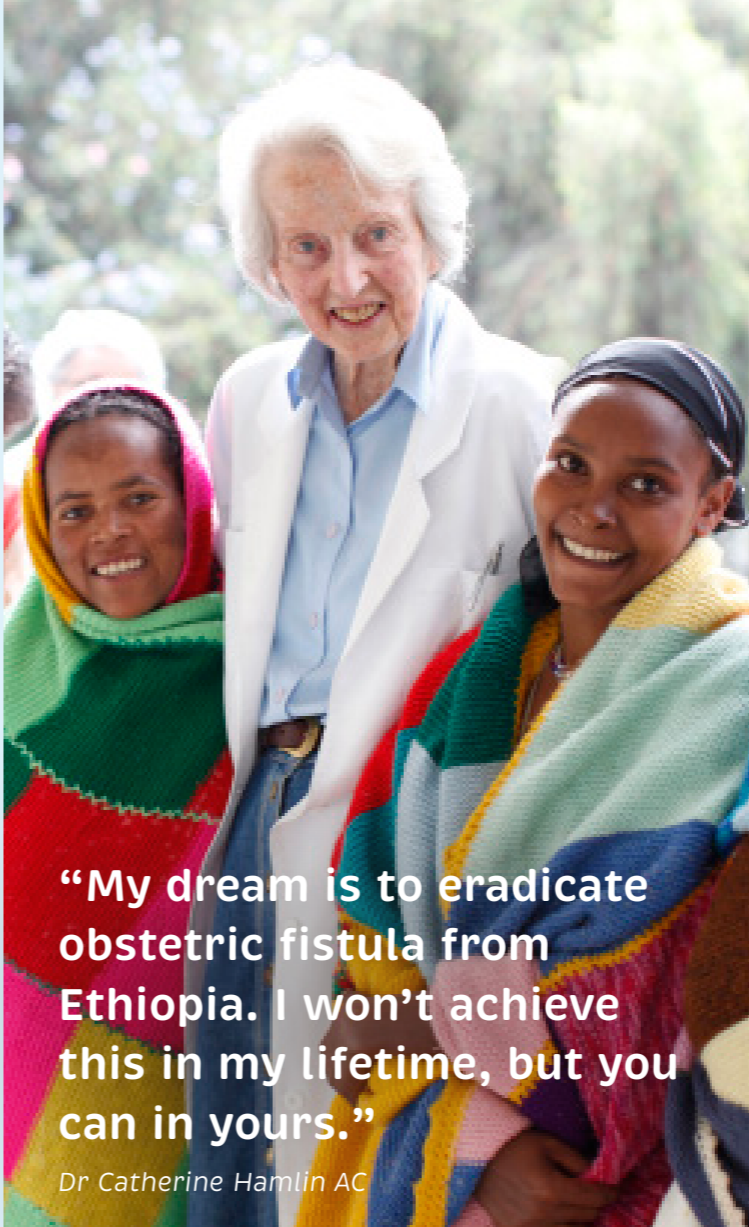
If you would like to help in this way, call us on 02 9440 7001 or visit [hamlin.org.au/regulargiving](http://hamlin.org.au/regulargiving). To make a one-off donation visit [hamlin.org.au/donate](http://hamlin.org.au/donate)

### Your Donation Saves Lives!



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**"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 a woman 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.



- Patient identification**
- Clothing & a Hamlin blanket**
- Physiotherapy**
- Vocational training**
- Women's empowerment program**
- Surgical repair**
- Nutrition**
- Counselling**
- Reintegration support**



## 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 Fistula Ethiopia to learn this acclaimed best practice for fistula surgery.

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

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

Catherine 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, putting them through a rigorous four-year BSc degree in Midwifery, and deploying them back to their villages where their skills are most needed.

The College launched a Postgraduate MSc in Clinical Midwifery early in 2022, focussed on emergency obstetric, gynaecologic and newborn care.

**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 more than 50 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

Fistula surgery at Hamlin is supplemented with physiotherapy and counselling to help recovering patients regain their physical and mental health.

Hamlin also provides rehabilitation programs and reintegration support at Desta Mender, a farm and training centre established in 2002. Here, women receive vocational training. With the help of start-up grants facilitated by Hamlin, many women go 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 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 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.**

Mamitu was previously listed as #32 on the BBC’s global list of 100 Inspirational Women.

Mamitu has a special love and empathy for the patients. Catherine used 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 as a fistula surgeon 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 here.**



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

Discover our range of ethically-made gifts from across Africa, including products made by recovering fistula patients at Hamlin. Your order is packed with love by our volunteers.



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



## Must-read Book, *Healing Lives!*

*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](https://store.hamlin.org.au)

