

## Dr Catherine Hamlin

Founded over 65 years ago by pioneering Australian surgeons Dr Catherine Hamlin and her 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 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 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 Catherine’s pioneering guidance, over 70,000 Ethiopian women have had their fistula injuries treated. But there is still much work to be done. An estimated 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 fistula 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 has restored health and dignity to over 70,000 Ethiopian women and is accelerating the eradication of fistula across the country.

But we need your help. For as little as \$4.20 a day you can provide life-changing treatment and care to a woman in Ethiopia who has suffered a devastating childbirth injury.

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?

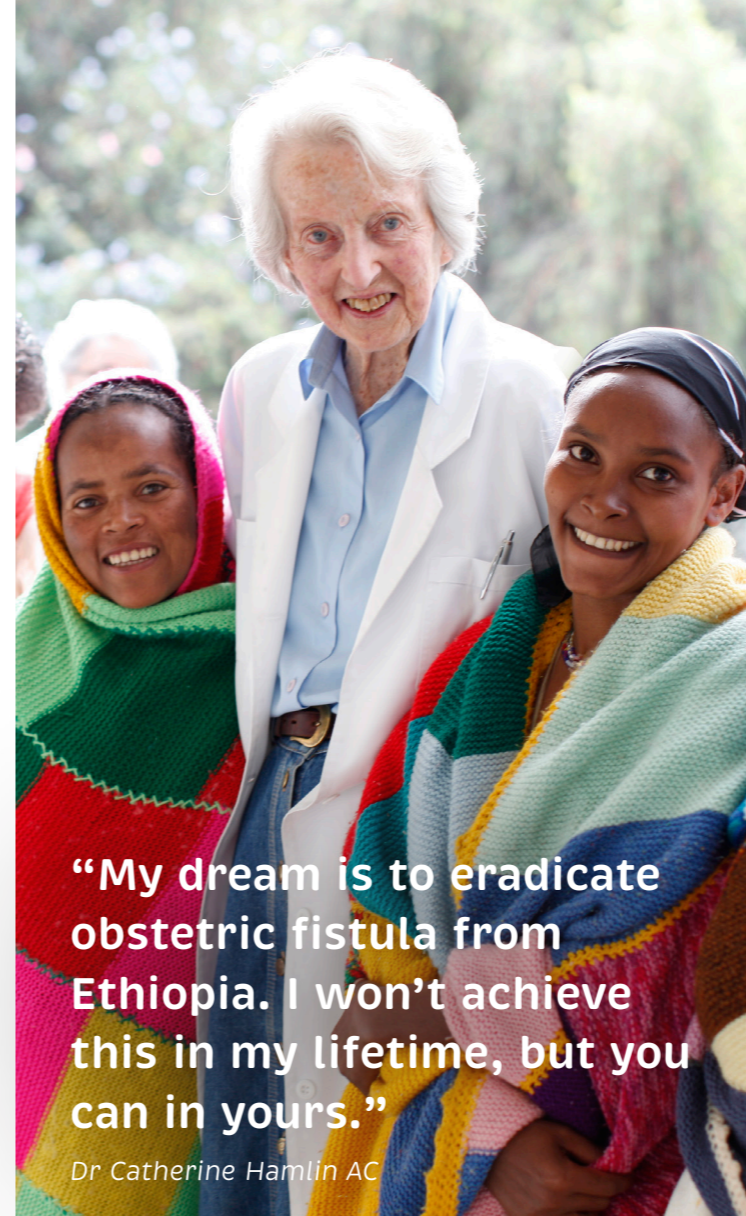
If you would like to help in this way, call us on **02 9440 7001** or visit [hamlin.org.au/regulargiving](http://hamlin.org.au/regulargiving). To make a one-off donation visit [hamlin.org.au/donate](http://hamlin.org.au/donate)

## Your Donation Transforms Lives.



**Catherine Hamlin Fistula Foundation**  
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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 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 isn’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 every 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.





## 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*

Hamlin’s 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.

Thanks to generous donors, all six Hamlin fistula hospitals also provide a birthing facility where former patients can return for a safe caesarean delivery, free of charge.

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.

## Project Zero: The road map to end fistula

Project Zero, Hamlin’s ground-breaking new program to accelerate the eradication of fistula in Ethiopia, launched in 2023.

Going from door-to-door, woreda (district) by woreda, our goal is to find and treat every woman in Ethiopia living with obstetric fistula and do all in our power to prevent childbirth injuries in the future.

## Prevention: Training Local Midwives



Catherine knew that the key to a fistula-free world is through prevention. More midwives are needed in rural areas of Ethiopia to identify pregnancy complications and prevent obstetric fistulas from occurring.

**This is the cornerstone of Catherine’s vision – ensuring that women in Ethiopia have access to quality healthcare to prevent fistula injuries in the first place.**

The Hamlin College of Midwives was established in 2007 to increase access to quality healthcare across Ethiopia. It’s a centre of excellence for the training of midwives. Each student is on a full Hamlin scholarship, funded by generous donors.

Students are recruited from rural areas and undertake a rigorous four-year BSc degree in Midwifery before being deployed back to their local area to work in Hamlin-supported midwifery clinics where their skills are urgently needed.

**New cases of fistula drop to almost zero in nearby villages when a Hamlin midwife arrives.**

Since opening, over 270 Hamlin Midwives have graduated from the College. They are working in more than 90 Hamlin-supported midwifery clinics in rural areas.

In 2022, the College launched a postgraduate MSc in Clinical Midwifery, focusing on emergency obstetric, gynaecologic and newborn care.

## Rehabilitation: Isolation to Independence

Catherine Hamlin always believed that treating a fistula patient is about more than surgery. It’s about treating the whole woman with love and care.

That’s why she developed a Rehabilitation and Reintegration program at Desta Mender (‘Joy Village’ in Amharic) to further support longer-term fistula patients with more complex injuries. The program embodies the Hamlin Model of Care and empowers women to live with independence and dignity.

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

Each woman receives a tailored program and is offered counselling, literacy and numeracy classes, as well as vocational and life skills training.

The Hamlin team supports women to find sustainable employment upon reintegration to their communities. With the help of start-up grants facilitated by Hamlin, some women go on to establish their own businesses so they can earn an income.

In 2021, Desta Mender launched a ground-breaking new Women’s Empowerment Program. The two-month residency trains 245 former fistula patients every year and offers leadership and communications training as well as small business guidance.



*Elfnesh has a stable source of income from her shop so she can provide for her daughter*

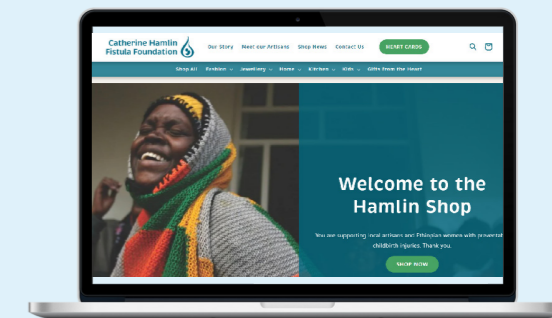
## The Hamlin Shop [store.hamlin.org.au](https://store.hamlin.org.au)

Give a gift that gives back! Discover our range of fairtrade and ethically-made gifts from across Africa, including products made by recovering fistula patients at Hamlin. Your order is packed with love by our volunteers.

**All proceeds from the Hamlin Shop support Hamlin Fistula Ethiopia’s treatment for women suffering from obstetric fistula injuries.**

Your purchase also supports the independent makers earning a living through their craft.

Visit [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)

