



Global Handwashing Day 10-Year Review: Lessons for planners and celebrants

Global Handwashing Day is a global advocacy day dedicated to increasing awareness and understanding about handwashing with soap to prevent diseases and save lives. After 10 years of Global Handwashing Day celebrations, the Global Handwashing Partnership conducted a review of the Day to help understand how to maximize the impact of the day.

This review was conducted through 10 key informant interviews, a survey with 90 respondents, a discussion with the Global Handwashing Day task force, and review of past Global Handwashing Day reports. The review is based on feedback and insights from Global Handwashing Day stakeholders and is not a formal study or evaluation.

Impact of Global Handwashing Day

Global Handwashing Day was designed to help communities, leaders, and advocates promote the life-saving act of handwashing with soap. Based on this review, the Day has provided significant opportunities for celebrants to increase their efforts and overall impact.

- **Global Handwashing Day is an opportunity to raise awareness about the importance of handwashing with soap.** In our survey, 97.8% of respondents agreed that Global Handwashing Day provides them an opportunity to raise awareness about handwashing. Key informants described using Global Handwashing Day to reach a large audience with handwashing messages, to reach out to new audiences, and to use creative approaches to make sure that messages ‘stick’. While awareness is not sufficient to change handwashing behavior, it remains an important component.
- **Global Handwashing Day is a platform for advocacy.** In our survey, 93.2% of participants agreed that Global Handwashing Day provides an opportunity for targeted advocacy. Qualitative data showed a wide range of examples in advocacy, including awareness raising with policy makers, and direct engagement around specific policies or programs. Key informants described the day as an opportunity to reward policy makers and organizations who had worked to improve the enabling environment for hygiene, while providing a nudge to organizations who had not made progress. Some participants were able to link their Global Handwashing Day outreach to longer-term prioritization of hygiene.
- **Global Handwashing Day can build collaboration and learning.** Participants described Global Handwashing Day as a bridge to engage new partners and learn from others. One key informant described it as an “entry point to work with new institutions,” on an event or campaign, which then led to larger partnerships. Others described using Global Handwashing Day to promote integrated approaches and to promote handwashing to other sectors.



- **Global Handwashing Day brings increased visibility to the importance of hygiene.** Collective advocacy and coverage provide visibility through media, campaigns, and events. One key informant noted that “Only by speaking with one voice will we increase the volume.” Social media plays a growing role in Global Handwashing Day, and approximately 20% of survey participants reported having shared information about Global Handwashing Day through personal or organizational social media accounts.

Limitations of Global Handwashing Day

While Global Handwashing Day has provided a platform for communities to discuss the importance of handwashing with soap, there were some key limitations noted in our review.

- **We can’t reach everyone alone.** Several key informants said they felt knew their campaigns and celebrations could not reach every audience. Participants noted that it was unrealistic to expect each celebration to reach multiple audiences, and campaigns and events were usually stronger when focused on a specific audience.
- **Improving handwashing requires more than a day:** Participants felt that Global Handwashing Day efforts were more likely to have impact when they were the culmination or celebration of ongoing work, rather than a stand-alone event. They also noted that it can be difficult to gather all the learning from Global Handwashing Day events and technical materials released on the day, since so many are promoted online at the same time.
- **We need to keep the story fresh:** Handwashing messaging is relatively common, which can make it challenging to present information in a new or exciting way. Some participants noted that this may prevent advocates from engaging champions or influencers, or from gaining media coverage.

Recommendations for Planners

Based on the findings from this review, the GHP produced the following recommendations for Global Handwashing Day planners to maximize the Day’s benefits and reframe its limitations.

- **Leverage Global Handwashing Day for targeted advocacy:** Celebrants have had advocacy successes around Global Handwashing Day, particularly when they engage policy makers and other decision makers in their celebrations. Read our [advocacy toolkit](#) and [planner’s guide](#) for guidance on hygiene advocacy.
- **Integrate Global Handwashing Day into behavior change efforts:** Global Handwashing Day is an opportunity to reinforce and raise awareness of the importance of handwashing, often through creative and engaging ways. Awareness alone does not change behavior, but it forms an important part of ongoing behavior change efforts. Read our [behavior change tools](#) to learn how to create lasting handwashing habits.



- **Work with media and influencers to spread the word:** Social media is an increasingly important tool to share messages and engage in conversations. Traditional media, and locally important leaders, can also be influential in spreading hygiene messages to large audiences. Leverage organizational and individual resources and connections to expand your media reach.
- **Understand and focus on your audience:** Events and campaigns are most successful when they are designed for a specific audience. When planning, take time to define and understand your audience, and design your celebrations accordingly. Read our [advocacy toolkit](#) and [planner's guide](#) for more ideas on how to do this.
- **Collaborate with others and take part in a global movement:** While one campaign or event can't reach everyone, join the global conversation to bring more focus to the importance of handwashing. Consider engaging new partners in your Global Handwashing Day celebrations. Reach out to people or organizations that haven't celebrated before or may not focus on hygiene.

Updates to Global Handwashing Partnership Campaign

We've also made some changes to how the Global Handwashing Partnership coordinates Global Handwashing Day. This year, we have focused our social media toolkit more closely around a specific theme. The campaign includes [five main calls to action](#) for individuals and organizations. In addition, we're launching a new [crowd hub](#) to share resources that come out around GHD and make them easier to find. We're also exploring new ways of measuring how people celebrate Global Handwashing Day, including through social media.

We welcome any feedback from Global Handwashing Day celebrants. A full version of the review report is available upon request. Please contact us at contact@globalhandwashing.org to request a copy or with any feedback.

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