



No more Leaks – Innovative ways to manage incontinence during and after a disaster.

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Abstract text

Background: Incontinence is a prevalent health issue affecting approximately one quarter of our total population and is commonly intensified during and after stressful events such as natural disasters. Whilst Vanuatu experiences frequent natural disasters, incontinence management is often ignored during disaster planning and response efforts. The Vanuatu Water, Women & Disability Study conducted by World Vision and key partners, discovered that 29% of people experience incontinence and 33% of people with disabilities experience urinary or fecal incontinence at least 3 times per week. 50% of these had no knowledge of, or access to, products to help safely manage incontinence. This led to unsafe practices such as restricting food, water and social interaction including disaster evacuation due to fear of leaks, resulting in harassment or abuse.

Methods: The Leftemap Laef Program, delivered in partnership between World Vision, Provincial Health and Village Health Workers (VHW's) aims to increase awareness of incontinence, and introduce innovative new management products such as locally made reusable incontinence wear, washable mattress protectors, commode chairs and wash mitts, designed to suit the needs of people with disabilities. Data collection utilized pre and post training surveys with VHW's and interviews with a purposive sample of community members in target communities.

Results: The study revealed significant positive outcomes for people who experience incontinence within Vanuatu. VHW's reported a 79% rise in awareness of incontinence and a 93% increase in knowledge of assistive devices and products to support incontinence management. Community members reported an 84% increase in the utilization of assistive products for managing incontinence.

Discussion: This project highlights the importance of providing information and locally accessible products to enable safe incontinence management during and after disasters. Integrating incontinence information and safe management products in disaster planning and response enables a more inclusive and resilient society where no one is left behind.