Fistula Foundation

Fistula Foundation is the global leader in treating childbirth injuries such as obstetric fistula, a devastating condition that leaves women incontinent and often humiliated and shunned by their communities. In addition to covering direct surgery costs, Fistula Foundation also supports surgeon training, equips facilities, invests in grassroots community outreach, and provides holistic post-surgery reintegration.

Their annual demonstrated impact includes:

- Providing more than 16,500 surgeries in 2024 to repair childbirth injuries, including fistula.
- Supporting a global network of 95 partner organizations that deliver high-quality care at 170 hospital sites across Africa and Asia.
- Strengthening treatment networks in high-burden countries—the Democratic Republic of Congo, Tanzania, Kenya, Zambia, and Nigeria—by collaborating with Ministries of Health and key stakeholders to enhance coordination, foster collaboration, and amplify impact for women.

United States (USD)

Donations are **tax-deductible** in the country selected. See our global tax-deductibility options.

DONATE NOW

By Card, Bank Transfer or Paypal

OTHER WAYS TO DONATE

By Check, ACH, Zelle, Crypto, etc.

Key Strengths

Scale, Depth of Impact

Multidimensional Poverty Index Indicators

Social Connectedness, Empowerment, Being, Assets

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Other Key Outcomes

Disease Burden

Recent Expense Budget

$23 Million (FY 2023)

Year Founded

2000

The problem: obstetric fistula

Obstetric fistula is a devastating childbirth injury. It most commonly occurs in poor, rural areas in Africa and Asia where women have limited access to emergency obstetric care, such as a C-section. When a woman experiences a prolonged, obstructed labor under these conditions, the constant pressure of the baby's head on the pelvis restricts blood flow to the soft tissue between the mother's vagina and her bladder or rectum, leaving holes known as "fistulae." These holes cause incontinence.

Unable to control her urine and/or feces, a woman can also suffer from chronic infections and painful sores. What's more, with too little community understanding of fistula and its causes, a woman can be blamed for her condition and shunned by her neighbors and family.

Fistula Foundation also treats severe perineal tears—a childbirth injury similar to fistula that leaves a woman incontinent of feces.

It is estimated that there are over a million young women that live with untreated obstetric fistula in Asia and sub-Saharan Africa. [1]

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The solution: cost-effective, restorative surgery

An obstetric fistula can only be treated with corrective surgery. If the operation is performed by a skilled surgeon, a woman with fistula can very often return to a normal life, with her continence and hope restored. However, due to stigma, lack of awareness, poverty, and inadequate healthcare systems, far too many women continue to go without the treatment they need.

Aggregated data from Fistula Foundation's current partners shows it costs $633 to provide a woman in Africa or Asia with life-changing fistula repair surgery and pre- and post-operative care services—less than a single night's stay in most hospitals in the United States. [2] Actual surgical costs vary depending on the local economies and healthcare infrastructure where partners work. The costs for more complicated surgeries can be greater. The global success rate for fistula repair surgery is approximately 86%. [3]

The estimated total cost for Fistula Foundation to treat one woman is $1,189. This includes all direct program expenses—surgery, patient identification, transportation, reintegration support, community outreach, healthcare provider training, and facility upgrades—as well as organizational administrative costs.

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Fistula most commonly affects women in their twenties who live in countries where the average lifespan is approximately 65 years. A one-time surgical intervention, therefore, can restore 40+ years of health. Peer-reviewed research confirms that surgery is a highly effective intervention for curing women's incontinence, and it has a lasting impact on women's lives. Research detailing Fistula Foundation's program in Kenya found that more than 85% of women treated there reported being able to fully socialize, work, and function normally one year after surgery—compared with 18% who reported normal functioning before surgery. [4]

Fistula Foundation invests in four key areas to strengthen health systems and enable quality care at scale. Those investment areas include 1) **training surgeons** and healthcare providers, 2) upgrading surgical **facilities**, 3) supporting **community outreach** teams to raise awareness about fistula and connect women to treatment, and 4) supporting women's **reintegration** into their communities after surgery. To ensure these efforts are sustainable and scalable, the organization also maintains dedicated fundraising and administrative teams in their headquarters that work to secure the financial resources needed to deliver high-quality surgeries and the effective delivery of support services.

The average direct cost of fistula surgery, including pre- and post-operative care, is $633. The total cost for Fistula Foundation to deliver services—including all programmatic and administrative expenses—is $1,189 per woman treated.

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How Fistula Foundation works

Fistula Foundation is the global leader in treating childbirth injuries, funding more fistula repair surgeries than any other organization in the world, including the US government. Its focused approach on treatment aims to provide as many life-changing repair surgeries as possible. At least 85% of funds raised by Fistula Foundation go directly to supporting programs.

Fistula Foundation's strategy builds sustainable in-country capacity by covering the cost of surgery, surgeon and healthcare provider training, medical equipment/facilities, and community outreach and post-surgery rehabilitation. Fistula Foundation partners closely with local doctors and nurses who are part of the communities they work within and best understand how to implement effective care.

Fistula Foundation makes grants by invitation only. Potential partners go through a rigorous review process that includes external reference checks of local doctors' reputations, fistula surgery skills, and certification. Grant recipients receive funds in stages and are required to provide regular, detailed reports. Fistula Foundation also conducts regular site visits, both to build a closer relationship between Fistula Foundation staff and their partners on the ground, as well as to ensure appropriate use of funds.

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Fistula Foundation's longest-term partner is Dr. Denis Mukwege, founder and president of Panzi Hospital in the Democratic Republic of Congo, and recipient of the 2018 Nobel Peace Prize.

In 2014, Fistula Foundation launched an innovative countrywide treatment network program in Kenya, with the goal to reach all women in the country in need of care. Its integrated network allows surgeons, outreach workers, and hospitals to share resources and information to effectively treat more Kenyan women than ever before. Building on the success in Kenya, the Foundation expanded its Fistula Foundation Treatment Network (FFTN) model to Zambia (2017), the Democratic Republic of Congo (2022), and Tanzania (2023).

Each FFTN aims to connect all women across a country who suffer from childbirth injuries with timely, high-quality surgical care. The Foundation's ambition is to end women's wait for care, country by country. The FFTN model connects pa
treatment and to provide holistic care to women who o

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countrywide treatment network enables a range of services that includes community outreach, training in expert fistula care, and post-surgery rehabilitation for fistula survivors.

Globally active since
2009
Active in
32
countries
95
partner organizations
170+
hospital sites
16K
surgeries funded annually
115K
surgeries funded by end of 2025

Other ways to donate

We recommend that gifts up to $1,000 be made online by credit card. If you are giving more than $1,000, please consider one of these alternatives.

CHECK

BANK TRANSFER

DONOR ADVISED FUND

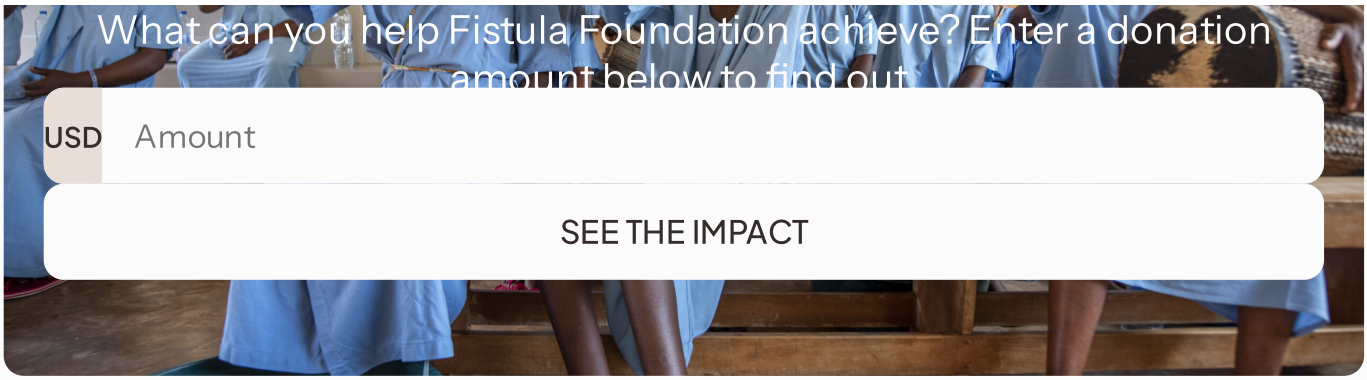
CRYPTOCURRENCIES

STOCKS OR SHARES

BEQUESTS

CORPORATE MATCHING PROGRAM





What makes Fistula Foundation so effective

Cost-effectiveness

Fistula treatment is highly cost-effective—on average, $633 can deliver surgery and pre- and post-operative care. The total cost for Fistula Foundation to provide services is, on average, $1,189 per woman treated. This includes all direct program expenses—surgery, patient identification, transportation, reintegration support, community outreach, healthcare provider training, and facility upgrades—as well as organizational administrative costs.

Fistula Foundation's peer-reviewed research revealed that a dollar spent on treatment goes remarkably far toward improving the quality of a woman's life. It costs just $58 to restore one year of healthy life for one woman (compared to $343 to bring orthopedic surgery to children). [5]

Dramatic impact

Fistula dramatically limits a woman's ability to earn a living or provide for her family. The Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluations estimated in 2017 that the burden of living with obstetric fistula is comparable to living with terminal cancer, and double the burden of blindness. [6] Using a methodology that applies DALYs (Disability-Adjusted Life Years) data to regional GDP data, Fistula Foundation calculated that the economic impact of untreated obstetric fistula across sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia totals nearly $700

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Fistula Foundation's accountability

Fistula Foundation vets potential partners through a careful review process that involves its program staff, its board of directors, and its Grants Review Committee. It also relies on expert input from eight medical and program advisors with decades of collective experience in fistula management. Partner organizations receiving funding provide quarterly progress reports detailing their project activities and costs, surgical outcomes, and any challenges that they have encountered. Fistula Foundation releases funds to a partner only after its staff reviews and approves each report.

Since 2005, Fistula Foundation has met the Better Business Bureau's standards in all 20 categories of accountability, earning their seal of accreditation. [8]

A breakdown of expenditures, tax returns, audits, and annual reports is available on the Fistula Foundation website. [9]

Recognition for Fistula Foundation

GuideStar by Candid has given the Foundation a Platinum seal—the highest level of recognition that it awards to charities. Charity Navigator has awarded an "exceptional" four-star rating to the Foundation every year since 2006. Additionally, Fistula Foundation has been named a top-rated charity by Charity Watch. GreatNonprofits, on the basis of more than 800 five-star supporter reviews, has designated the Foundation as a Top-Rated Charity. Fistula Foundation was honored as a 2024 Kristof Holiday Impact Prize winner by Nicholas Kristof, a two-time Pulitzer Prize winning journalist for *The New York Times*. Out of 1.8 million nonprofits in the U.S., it was chosen as one of three winners. [10] [11] [12] [13] [14]

SOURCES

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