



Until We Heal

Frequently Asked Questions

The lack of access to safe surgery, that is timely and effective, is a global health crisis and an unacceptable social injustice against two-thirds of the world's population. Operation Smile is using its expertise gained in the past 35 years to solve what may feel like impossible problems — like eradicating the backlog of unrepaired cleft conditions — and Until We Heal* is its platform to inspire and influence change in the world.

What is Until We Heal?

Until We Heal is a global movement uniting like-minded advocates who will influence global health and world leaders to advance access to safe surgery for all people with cleft conditions. We achieve this by creating platforms for activism, government engagement and the establishment of medical programs.

For the past 35 years, Operation Smile has come to know the physical and emotional pain of hundreds of thousands of people with cleft conditions. Safe surgery has transformed their lives of suffering into lives of health, well-being and dignity. They have been lifted from hopelessness to possibility.

Even today, there are billions¹ of people who don't have access to safe surgery that's timely and effective. Too many are dying. The truth is, more people die each year from the lack of access to safe surgery than from AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria *combined*. Yet, very few people are talking about surgery as a global health priority.

Operation Smile believes it's time to change that – it's time to create a community of like-minded advocates who can influence world leaders to commit to creating medical programs in their countries that will advance access to safe surgery for patients living with cleft conditions.

Together, our actions create the global movement we call Until We Heal.

Why focus on cleft?

Operation Smile has provided hundreds of thousands of free surgeries for children and young adults in low- and middle-income countries who are born with cleft lip, cleft palate or other facial deformities. We are also one of the oldest and largest volunteer-based organizations dedicated to improving the health and lives of children worldwide through access to surgical care.



Surgery can quickly change the lives of people who suffer from cleft and other treatable conditions like obstructed labor, club foot, cataracts, appendicitis, hernia and general injury. We do our part by making safe surgical care our priority, and our experience spans 35 years of healing patients with cleft conditions.

What is safe surgery and why is this important?

Safe surgery means providing patients with the highest quality of care, based on the highest medical standards, no matter where they live. Operation Smile wants the best possible surgical result for each and every patient. To better understand *safe surgery*, consider the threat of *unsafe surgery*: the risks for medical complications are high, as equipment is unsterile, and mistakes are made due to insufficient medical training. Unsafe surgery is harmful, if not deadly, while safe surgery is the first step on the path to healing.

The majority of people who lack access to safe surgical care are often the poorest in their countries, excluded from care due to economic and social barriers and residing in remote locations far from surgical sites. But, as reported by the World Health Organization, the rate of anaesthesia-associated mortality in low- and middle-income countries is between 100 to 1,000 times higher than in high-income countries. Infections and other post-operative complications are serious concerns around the world.² If patients can get surgery to repair their cleft conditions, they should have the right to receive surgery that's safe.

Read more about safe surgery by referring to our [Safe Surgery Resource](#).

How does the Until We Heal campaign help advance access to safe surgery?

The lack of access to safe surgery is a global health crisis, and we want this campaign to unite a community of advocates who recognize that access to safe surgery is a fundamental human right.

Consider that a mother may have to decide whether her family should eat that day or get surgery for her cleft. A father may accept there is no way to make up for his lost wages if he has to miss work to get surgery for his child. A grandmother may accept the cruel reality that she lives too far away from a health system to get surgery for her grandson. Worse, patients around the world may not know surgery exists at all to fix their cleft lip or cleft palate. A patient's barrier to safe surgery is never just one thing. Whether a patient is experiencing a combination of geographic, economic or social barriers, there are too many barriers to care, and too many people are dying unnecessarily.



Awareness alone does very little – we also need action. We are asking world leaders to commit to medical programs that will advance access to safe surgery for patients living in their country with cleft conditions. By pledging to support these efforts, our advocates will continue to ensure that safe surgery is made accessible – that countries worldwide will recognize safe surgery as a dire need and make the government engagements needed to solve the problem.

Why is Operation Smile relevant to this kind of movement?

Operation Smile is uniquely positioned to help support access to safe surgery in low- and middle-income countries. Our relevance to this movement is rooted in 35 years of expertise that includes:

- Improving the quality of surgical care around the world by establishing Global Standards of Care**
- Developing solutions for local health systems and its challenges by way of community-based focus groups, facility audits and health care worker interviews
- Implementing improved patient management and recruitment plans with the use of patient registries and patient accompaniment programs
- Increasing the availability of resources to support cleft care as a result of philanthropy and public-private partnerships
- Increasing the number and quality of health care workers through volunteer engagement and education and training programs
- Understanding the causation of cleft and developing clinical pathways for better patient care as a result of genetic and clinical research

We want the Until We Heal campaign to bring attention to safe surgery as it applies to treating cleft conditions, and raise this as a priority on the global health agenda.

You refer to medical programs and world leaders as part of the solution. How does this work?

Our goal is to advance access to safe surgery for people suffering from cleft conditions. To do that successfully, we need government engagement and relevant medical programs that are customized to each of the countries we're appealing to.

Operation Smile is engaging 35 Ministries of Health in the promise to provide access to essential surgery in their respective countries. We need governments to support this movement in order to bring safe surgery to every patient with a cleft condition. While medical program strategies will vary between countries, each has needs for finding patients and increasing the number of skilled health care professionals to provide the highest-quality care.



- In addition to other patient recruitment and patient management programs, we are working on a patient registry app and web platform to connect patients with health care workers in their communities as part of our commitment to finding every patient who suffers from a cleft condition.
- To showcase our organization's ability to execute large-scale local surgical and educational programs, we are aiming to reach more than 5,000 patients and health care workers in one week this November. This mobilization is symbolic of the local surgical capacity Operation Smile has built in the past 35 years.

I'm only one person. What can I do?

We encourage you to take the Until We Heal pledge to advocate for safe surgery. Be the light for the patient living in shame from his cleft lip – teased and alone; or the voice for the patient living in silence from her cleft palate – too afraid to speak. [Bring attention to an issue that needs people to care.](#)

You can visit untilweheal.org, take the pledge and commit to action – whether that's through sharing the pledge with others, community outreach or raising money.

What is the Until We Heal pledge, and who is it for?

Every day, children worldwide suffer from cleft conditions because they do not have the access to the safe surgery they need to live a healthy and fulfilling life. I pledge to advocate for safe surgery and its access worldwide, until we heal every child with a cleft.

Our goal is to show global health leaders and Ministries of Health that thousands of people around the world care about the lack of access to safe surgery for cleft conditions, and that this needs to change. Your pledge can help ensure that every person with a cleft condition has access to surgical care when they need it.

Anyone can sign the pledge, whether you're a head of state, an executive director, or a student. Take the pledge and ask your network of colleagues, friends, family and others to do the same.

[Will you help?](#)

Is Operation Smile changing its identity to Until We Heal?

[Until We Heal is one element of the larger Operation Smile brand and allows the organization to build interest in a new way.](#)



Until We Heal is expressly an advocacy campaign that was created to achieve a specific goal: unite a community of advocates to appeal to global leaders who will partner with Operation Smile and increase access to safe surgery for people suffering from cleft conditions in their respective countries.

Quick Links and Hashtags

- Website: <http://www.untilweheal.org/>
- Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/untilweheal>
- Twitter: <https://twitter.com/untilweheal>
- Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/untilweheal/>
- Hashtags: #SafeSurgery #UntilWeHeal

Why do you care about safe surgery for all people with cleft? Let your followers know and use the hashtags #SafeSurgery and #UntilWeHeal, and be sure to tag @UntilWeHeal.

¹Funk LM, Weiser TG, Berry WR, et al. Global operating theatre distribution and pulse oximetry supply: an estimation from reported data. Lancet. 2010; 376: 1055-1061.

² World Health Organization, Safe Surgery. Accessed January 30, 2017: <http://www.who.int/patientsafety/safesurgery/issue/en/>

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