

**FISCAL YEAR 2023 OUTSIDE WITNESS TESTIMONY:  
THE SOCIETY FOR WOMEN’S HEALTH RESEARCH**

**Prepared for:** Senate Labor, Health and Human Services, Education and Related Agencies  
Appropriations Subcommittee

**Testimony Addressing:** The National Institutes of Health (NIH), the NIH Office of Research on Women’s Health, and the *Eunice Kennedy Shriver* National Institute of Child Health and Human Development

The Society for Women’s Health Research (SWHR)—a more than 30-year-old national nonprofit with a mission of promoting research on biological sex differences in disease and improving women’s health through science, policy, and education—is pleased to submit testimony outlining SWHR’s funding requests for fiscal year (FY) 2023. While SWHR believes that all federal research is complementary and thus supports robust funding across all federal research and public health agencies, we specifically urge appropriators in FY 2023 to support a **program level of at least \$49 billion for the National Institutes of Health (NIH)**, at least **\$62.5 million for the Office of Research on Women’s Health (ORWH)** and **\$1.816 billion for the *Eunice Kennedy Shriver* National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD)**.

Biological sex differences influence disease development, progression, and response to treatment, while social determinants of health, including gender, affect disease risk, health care access, and outcomes. Yet, due to years of insufficient research addressing women, we have limited knowledge about women’s health relative to men’s health.

This lack of prioritization, or inattention, to women’s health has not only affected our understanding about key aspects of women’s health and overlooked a critical portion of the population, but it has also amounted to tremendous money lost for the U.S. economy. Recent [research](#) conducted by the RAND Corporation revealed that “even a slight increase in capital invested in basic research into women’s health would unleash staggering returns...” The study’s simulations, which examined the potential return on investment if NIH were to double the budget for studies specifically assessing the health of women, showed the tremendous opportunity that lies in women’s health:

*“By doubling the NIH budget for research on coronary artery disease in women from its current \$20 million, we could expect an ROI of 9,500 percent. Studies focused on rheumatoid arthritis in women receive just \$6 million a year. Doubling that would deliver an ROI of 174,000 percent and add \$10.5 billion to our economy over the 30-year timespan.” – Chloe Bird, [Fortune](#)*

Robust, sustained funding for federal research entities that prioritize research into diseases, conditions, and life stages that differently, disproportionately, or solely affect women across the lifespan is critical to achieve health equity for women. The COVID-19 pandemic served as an important reminder that sex and gender differences that exist across diseases (e.g., men are more at risk for worse outcomes from COVID-19 and have a heightened risk of death, while women

are more likely to be diagnosed with post-acute sequelae of COVID-19 and report more adverse events following vaccinations) and that health disparities are still widespread, with women disproportionately affected by socioeconomic challenges, food insecurity, domestic violence, and mental health concerns related to COVID-19.

To continue building on the progress made and to ensure women's needs are represented in federal research, SWHR urges Congress to prioritize women's health across the lifespan and women's health research by supporting NIH, ORWH, and NICHD in FY 2023 funding legislation.

## **THE NATIONAL INSTITUTES OF HEALTH**

The NIH is the premier medical research agency in the United States and the largest source of funding for biomedical and behavioral research in the world. As such, its mission is vital to promote the overall health and well-being of Americans by fostering creative discoveries and innovative research; training and supporting the next generation of researchers to ensure a diverse, strong research pipeline to continue scientific progress; and expanding the scientific and medical knowledge base.

Continued support for the NIH is necessary to drive women's health forward. Across NIH, researchers conduct and support basic, clinical, and translational research on diseases and conditions that impact women across the life stage. Among the NIH initiatives specifically aimed at improving women's health is the Trans-NIH Strategic Plan for Women's Health Research. Released in 2019, the 5-year Strategic Plan laid out broad NIH goals to complement its more targeted women's health programs, advancing women's health research, developing a well-trained biomedical research workforce, and promoting the role of sex and gender influences in research. Initiatives like these—along with the NIH's continued emphasis on improving standard research methodologies to address sex and gender and providing funding for women's health research—will help us achieve consequential progress in making women's health mainstream.

SWHR urges Congress to provide a program level of at least \$49 billion for the NIH, a \$3.5 billion increase in the NIH appropriation plus funding from the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Cures Act for specific initiatives, in FY 2023. Additionally, SWHR asks that appropriators ensure that any funding for the new Advanced Research Projects Agency for Health (ARPA-H) or other targeted programs like pandemic preparedness supplement this base budget recommendation rather than supplant the foundational investment in NIH. This funding level, which is supported across the public health and scientific research communities, would allow for meaningful growth above inflation in the base budget and would expand NIH's capacity to support promising science in all disciplines (including women's health research) across the agency, keeping the NIH competitive on the world stage.

## **THE OFFICE OF RESEARCH ON WOMEN'S HEALTH**

The biomedical sciences for decades have treated men and women as interchangeable subjects. Research on diseases and treatments were conducted almost exclusively on male subjects as researchers sought to avoid the presumed "complications" introduced by including female

subjects in their work. This approach ignored the impact of sex and gender on human development and disease progression, overlooking a critical slice of the population and leaving untapped important areas of scientific opportunity.

As the NIH hub for coordinating women's health research, ORWH ensures women are represented across all NIH research and works to improve representation of women and women's health issues within federally funded research. ORWH provides critical leadership on programs, such as the Specialized Centers of Research Excellence, or SCORE, which advances translational research on the role of sex differences in the health of women, and the Implementing a Maternal health and Pregnancy Outcomes Vision for Everyone (IMPROVE) Initiative, which coordinates interdisciplinary research on factors impacting maternal mortality.

SWHR recommends that Congress provides \$62.5 million in funding for ORWH in FY 2023. This increase will allow ORWH to build upon its existing programs, take steps in realizing a vision where sex and gender are integrated into research and where women receive personalized, evidence-based prevention and treatment, and continue its efforts coordinating and elevating women's health research across NIH.

## **THE *EUNICE KENNEDY SHRIVER* NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF CHILD HEALTH AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT**

The NICHD, founded to investigate human development throughout the life process, also provides a home for women's health research in areas across reproductive sciences and maternal health, including infertility, pregnancy, and menopause. The Institute's research portfolio is critical for addressing pressing public health issues, such as pregnancy outcomes, gynecological health issues, such as uterine fibroids and endometriosis, and the environmental, behavioral, and social factors that shape women's health.

Among NICHD's myriad contributions to women's health research is its work with respect to pregnant and lactating individuals. Nearly 94% of women take at least one medicine during pregnancy, and 50% take at least one medication during the postpartum period. Yet, pregnant and lactating women are often excluded from biomedical research. Consequently, these women and their health care providers do not have access to the information they need to make confident decisions about their health care.

As part of its efforts to support these populations is NICHD's Maternal and Pediatric Precision in Therapeutics (MPRINT) Hub, which will serve as a national resource for expertise in maternal and pediatric therapeutics to conduct and foster therapeutics-focused research in obstetrics, lactation, and pediatrics while enhancing inclusion of people with disabilities. The MPRINT Hub will aggregate, present, and expand the available knowledge, tools, and expertise in maternal and pediatric therapeutics to the broader research, regulatory science, and drug development communities.

SWHR calls on Congress to provide at least \$1.816 billion for NICHD in FY 2023 so the Institute can continue driving advancements in women's reproductive health and funding

research and training activities that help address some of the nation's leading public health issues.

\*\*\*

SWHR appreciates the opportunity to submit this testimony and thanks the Subcommittee of considering our requests of a program level of at least \$49 billion for NIH, at least \$62.5 million for ORWH and \$1.816 billion for NICHD. We look forward to working with you to ensure the highest possible support for federal research agencies in FY 2023. If you have questions or need any additional information, please contact SWHR President and CEO Kathryn G. Schubert at [kathryn@swhr.org](mailto:kathryn@swhr.org).