

**FISCAL YEAR 2024 OUTSIDE WITNESS TESTIMONY:  
THE SOCIETY FOR WOMEN’S HEALTH RESEARCH**

**Prepared for:** House Appropriations Committee’s Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education and Related Agencies

**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) 2024. SWHR—as a national thought leader dedicated to driving research and advancements in women’s health—recognizes the critical role that the U.S. research infrastructure plays in improving outcomes for women across the lifespan. Therefore, SWHR encourages appropriators to provide robust funding increases to the nation’s federal research and public health entities. Specifically, we would encourage appropriators in FY 2024 to support at least **\$50.924 billion for the National Institutes of Health’s (NIH) foundational work**, at least **\$71.4 million in base funding for the NIH Office of Research on Women’s Health (ORWH)**—in addition to the funding provided to its new Office of Autoimmune Disease Research—and at least **\$1.877 billion for the *Eunice Kennedy Shriver* National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD)**.

For far too long in our nation’s history, women have been left behind in scientific endeavors. Women have not only historically been excluded from participating in clinical trials, but they have also been underrepresented in science production itself, lagging in representation of senior academic and leadership positions.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Promising Practices for Addressing the Underrepresentation of Women in Science, Engineering, and Medicine: Opening Doors. National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine; Policy and Global Affairs; Committee

While progress has been made, the years of women’s exclusion from scientific research resulted in a failure to consider the impact of sex and gender on the human development and disease progression, overlooking a critical slice of the population and leaving important areas of scientific opportunity untapped. Said differently, the exclusion left the nation playing “catch up” to make up for years of lost knowledge. SWHR urges Congress to ensure that women’s health across the lifespan is prioritized in FY 2024 funding legislation by supporting NIH, ORWH, and NICHD.

**NIH:** 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 five-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

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on Women in Science, Engineering, and Medicine; Committee on Increasing the Number of Women in Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics, and Medicine (STEMM). [National Academies Press \(US\)](#); 2020 Feb 28.

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 \$50.9 billion for the NIH, a \$3.465 billion increase over the comparable FY 2023 program level. 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.

Additionally, SWHR remains highly supportive of the Advanced Research Projects Agency for Health (ARPA-H) and encourages Congress to renew the ARPA-H investment in FY 2024. ARPA-H has the potential not only to benefit areas of health and disease that have not historically received robust funding, including many of these conditions unique to or more common in women, but also to help ensure equity in health outcomes and health care access and use.

**ORWH:** 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 \$71.4 million in funding for ORWH in FY 2024. This increase will allow ORWH to build upon its existing programs, including the

Specialized Centers of Research Excellence (SCORE) program, 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; work to further integrate sex and gender into research; and continue its efforts coordinating and elevating women's health research across NIH.

SWHR also supports expanding investments into the new Office of Autoimmune Disease Research, which was established in the FY 2023 omnibus appropriations bill. Given the disproportionate impact of autoimmune diseases and conditions on women and the rising prevalence of autoimmune biomarkers in the United States, increasing national attention and funding for this space will be vital. SWHR also supports the Autoimmune Association's recommendation to expand the Office's name to the Office of Research on Autoimmune and Immune-Mediated Diseases.

**NICHD:** 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 serves 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 Hub was established to 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 and has the potential to generate novel tools and approaches to advance and accelerate research in maternal and pediatric therapeutics.

SWHR calls on Congress to provide at least \$1.877 billion for NICHD in FY 2024 so that 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.

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SWHR appreciates the opportunity to submit this testimony and thanks the Subcommittee for considering these requests. We look forward to working with you to ensure the highest possible support for federal research agencies in FY 2024. 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).