2025-2026

Women's Health Policy Agenda

MARCH 2025

Society for Women's Health Research

Women's health saw renewed momentum at the federal level over the past two years. Policymakers in the 118th Congress introduced myriad bipartisan bills on topics from maternal mortality to endometriosis and menopause, and there were unprecedented whole-of-government approaches to prioritize and sustain investments in women's health research and integrate women's health research across the federal research portfolio. We must build on this foundation to optimize women's health outcomes and close the women's health gap.

At the Society for Women's Health Research (SWHR), the nation's leader in advancing women's health and promoting research on sex differences, we recognize the significance of this moment and are eager to continue advancing our vision to make women's health mainstream.

One of the ways we do this is by engaging with policymakers throughout the year to champion policies that promote women's health. Rooted in science and in collaboration with partners and thought leaders in women's health, SWHR's policy work is dedicated to addressing gaps and unmet needs for women across the lifespan.

Helping to serve as a guidepost for its policy activities in 2025 and 2026 is SWHR's Women's Health Policy Agenda, which outlines SWHR's legislative priorities, building upon the 2023-2024 Federal Legislative Agenda, as well as the women's health focus areas where we believe we can drive the most meaningful change over the course of the coming year. The more comprehensive agenda reflects alignment with the launch of SWHR's 2024-2026 strategic plan, which was updated to position SWHR to respond to the evolving needs and opportunities in women's health as well as with SWHR's first Women's Health Research Agenda, published in January 2025.

Through collaboration with partners and stakeholders, policymakers, and women and their families, SWHR remains committed to advocating for initiatives that will improve care and access as well as health outcomes for all women over the lifespan.

We invite you to explore this agenda and join us in our efforts to make women's health mainstream.

Together, we can enact policies that reflect the unique needs of women across the nation.

Research is essential for advancing knowledge, developing treatments, and improving health outcomes. This includes providing critical insights into the prevention, diagnosis, and treatment of diseases that differently, disproportionately, or exclusively affect women.

The federal government has an important role to play in supporting and elevating women's health research. SWHR encourages Congress to provide robust investments for federal agencies that fund women's health research, including research that prioritizes understanding and eliminating disparities between men and women and closing important knowledge gaps to improve women's health and quality of life outcomes. This research helps us all and therefore should be a priority for legislators.

SWHR Priorities:

- **Federal Women's Health Research Funding**
  SWHR supports increased investments in federal research and public health agencies that predominately fund and support women's health research, such as the National Institutes of Health's (NIH) Office of Research on Women's Health (ORWH) and the *Eunice Kennedy Shriver* National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD). SWHR also champions women's health-focused research initiatives and projects within science and public health agencies, such as the Advanced Research Projects Agency for Health (ARPA-H).

- **Women's Health Programs and Initiatives**
  There was renewed momentum in women's health research at the federal level over the past two years, catalyzed by sweeping women's health research initiatives that sought to increase funding and drive advancements in women's health research. SWHR remains committed to building on that momentum and championing policies within Congress and the administration that prioritize and integrate women's health research across the federal government.

- **Bolster Offices of Women's Health**
  The Offices of Women's Health within and across the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) have an important role to play in advancing policies that address women's health needs across the lifespan, educating the public and health care professionals on topics in women's health, and coordinating women's health initiatives. SWHR will identify ways to sustain these offices and their work on behalf of the American people, whether through enhanced coordination with each other or through greater engagement with the public, to ensure these offices have the tools and capacity to reach their full potential.

- **Continuity of Public Health Infrastructure**
  A resilient public health infrastructure is essential for protecting and advancing women's health across the lifespan. This includes a well-trained, adequately funded public health workforce capable of responding to emerging health threats and addressing ongoing health disparities; the preservation of institutional authority to ensure the integrity of scientific research and data; and free and accessible federal research resources and datasets. SWHR supports policies that invest in workforce development, strengthen public health laboratories and surveillance systems, and promote sustainable funding for public health programs. We also advocate for safeguarding research independence, ensuring that public health decisions are made by the nation's scientific regulatory bodies, and that those decisions are guided by sound science. Having a strong, coordinated public health infrastructure is essential for equitable, effective health outcomes for all women.

- **Representation in Research**
  Historically, women have been underrepresented in clinical research (they weren't required to be included in federal research until 1993), leading to a lack of data on conditions that disparately or uniquely affect them. By investing in women's health research, we not only address the knowledge gaps that exist, but we gain insights that benefit broader populations. SWHR works with policymakers and key stakeholders on the following issues:

  – **Adherence to and Accountability Through Sex as a Biological Variable (SABV)**. Accounting for SABV in research helps uncover crucial distinctions in disease presentation, progression, and treatment responses between men and women.

SABV can also enhance the accuracy and relevance of medical guidelines, improving health outcomes across different populations. A 2020 progress report on the NIH Policy on SABV, as an example, demonstrates the power of SABV when it is applied, but notes that the integration of SABV into research currently depends on stakeholders, such as editors of biomedical journals.

SWHR supports studying, analyzing, and reporting on biological sex differences as a standard practice as well as taking steps to improve adherence to the policy in research design and reporting. Exceptions to using SABV in vertebrate and human studies should only occur in scientifically justified cases, such as for a condition that only occurs in one sex or sufficient prior evidence suggests no sex differences exist.

- **Ensure Sufficient Representation of Women and Sub-Populations of Women in Clinical Trials**. Great strides have been made in improving women's representation in clinical trials, but in certain areas of research, women are still underrepresented. Clinical research participants must be representative of the population being studied.

  As part of this work, SWHR continues to advocate for the appropriate inclusion of pregnant and lactating women in research. The historical exclusion of these populations has led to unnecessary knowledge gaps that not only hinder the ability of health care providers and women to make informed decisions about their care, but that may also harm health of pregnant and lactating individuals and their babies. SWHR urges policymakers to continue implementation of all 15 of the recommendations made by the Task Force on Research Specific to Pregnant Women and Lactating Women (PRGLAC), which could change the culture around this population's inclusion in research and improve researchers' ability to develop safe and effective therapies for these individuals and their babies.

- **Removal of Barriers that Prevent Women's Participation in Clinical Trials**. Women's participation in clinical trials is essential for developing treatments that address their unique health needs. However, numerous barriers, including restrictive eligibility criteria and caregiving responsibilities, have historically limited their involvement. Removing these obstacles and providing financial incentives for participation in clinical trials can better allow medical research to reflect the diverse experiences of women and lead to better health outcomes.

- **Support Women's Representation Across the Biomedical Research Workforce**. Despite more women earning degrees across science, engineering, technology, mathematics, and medicine (STEMM), women—and especially women of color—are "underrepresented relative to their presence in the workforce and the U.S. population," according to a 2020 National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (NASEM) report. Further, as summarized in a commentary in *Nature Medicine*, women also face barriers, such as being paid less than men in comparable positions, taking longer to be promoted, and having fewer "conventional markers of achievement in academia," such as fewer principal investigator positions on large NIH grants, than men. SWHR supports efforts to improve the representation of women and other historically underrepresented groups across all levels of the biomedical research workforce.

Achieving lasting improvements in women's health requires a whole-system approach that drives scientific innovation, strengthens public health infrastructure, and ensures access to high-quality care. Closing gaps in women's health demands targeted action, including addressing gender bias in health care, enacting comprehensive women's health legislation, and removing barriers to care. SWHR has identified the following key priorities for 2025–2026 to advance these goals:

- **Safeguard Robust Public Health and Research Agency Funding**
  America's federal public health and scientific agencies are core to improving the health, safety, and well-being of Americans across the lifespan. From studying the fundamental mechanisms underlying health and disease to capturing data that shapes our ability to monitor and respond to public health threats to translating research from the lab to the bedside, each plays a complementary role in the scientific enterprise. SWHR champions efforts to increase federal funding across agencies, including the NIH, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ), the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA), the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS), among others, and to preserve critical public health funding streams.

- **Champion Public Health Interventions Shown to Improve Women's Health Across the Lifespan**
  Investing in evidence-based public health interventions is critical to improving health outcomes for women at every stage of life. Public health strategies, such as cancer screening, chronic disease prevention programs, and vaccination uptake can protect against disease and reduce health disparities. SWHR supports policies that expand equitable access to these interventions, ensure culturally competent delivery, and prioritize research to identify effective strategies that advance women's health and well-being.

- **Pass Women's Health Legislation Aimed at Improving Women's Health and Quality of Life Outcomes**
  In the 118th Congress, policymakers introduced several bills focused on diseases, conditions, and life stages that differently, disproportionately, or solely affect women. Among the bills introduced were several bills related to menopause, bills related to uterine fibroids and endometriosis, bills related to maternal mortality, and more. SWHR is committed to working with policymakers in the 119th Congress to identify which bills could make the greatest difference for women across the lifespan and will advocate for their swift passage.

- **Strengthen Regulatory Science to Reflect Women's Health Needs**
  Regulatory science that accounts for sex-specific differences can help ensure that medical interventions are evaluated with an understanding of the impact of drugs, devices, and medical products on women. SWHR supports policies that strengthen requirements for sex-based analyses in clinical trials, enhance post-market surveillance to identify sex-specific effects, and promote the inclusion of diverse populations of women in all stages of biomedical research and regulatory review.

- **Encourage Policies that Create Better Workplaces for Women**
  Creating workplaces that support the leadership and progress of women is vital for the health, economic security, and well-being of women and their families. Women often face unique challenges in the workforce, including inadequate workplace accommodations (whether for pregnancy, caregiving responsibilities, the menopause transition, or a medical condition) and exposure to discrimination.

  These factors can harm physical and mental health, particularly for women in low-wage and marginalized communities, and significantly impact the economy. SWHR supports policies that expand access to paid leave, ensure safe and inclusive work environments, and provide flexible work arrangements. Building better workplaces for women not only improves individual health outcomes but also strengthens families, communities, and the broader economy.

Support Policies that Expand Access and Coverage to High Quality Health Care

Access to high-quality health care is fundamental to achieving optimal health outcomes for women. Yet, barriers exist—from issues obtaining insurance coverage to provider shortages in critical areas of health care. SWHR advocates for policies that provide women with the full range of treatment options, remove barriers to care, and support a robust health care workforce trained to address the unique needs of women. As part of this work, SWHR has designated the following as priorities:

- Address gender bias and other forms of implicit bias in health care
- Expand health care provider education for diseases, conditions, and life stages that differently, disproportionately, or specifically affect women
- Address health care workforce and clinician shortages (e.g., rheumatologists, geriatric health care workforce)
- Support telehealth flexibilities to expand access and remove barriers to care
- Ensure that insurance policies provide reasonable limits and do not create unnecessary barriers to treatment. Policies of focus include:
  - Co-pay accumulators
  - Non-medical switching
  - Prior authorization
  - Step therapy

Every aspect of women's health is important and arguably warrants greater attention and research. Given the wide-ranging nature of women's health concerns, SWHR has identified some of the most pressing issues for SWHR's work in 2025-2026:

- **Alzheimer's Disease.**
  Approximately two-thirds of the estimated 6.5 million U.S. adults living with Alzheimer's disease are women. Further, more than 60% of Alzheimer's disease caregivers are women—many of whom are uncompensated. SWHR engages on policy issues that could improve health and quality of life outcomes for women living with Alzheimer's disease and related dementias, including increased investments in brain health, championing the use of innovative diagnostic tools and treatments, enhancing care coordination, and more.

- **Autoimmune Diseases and Conditions.**
  Eighty percent of patients diagnosed with autoimmune diseases are women. SWHR supports policies spanning research and health care access that could lower health care costs for women with autoimmune diseases and improve outcomes. SWHR supports increased, targeted investments in autoimmune disease research, including in the NIH Office of Autoimmune Disease Research; flexible workplace policies; the incentivization of practicing rheumatology to address workforce shortages; expanded clinical education; and the modification of utilization management policies to support patients' needs and wellness throughout their care journeys.

- **Bone Health.**
  Women account for 80% of the estimated 10 million Americans with osteoporosis. Bone fractures have considerable health and quality of life implications and are costly to the U.S. health care system. SWHR champions policies that support women's bone health throughout the lifespan, which include implementing public health education campaigns aimed at promoting a bone-healthy lifestyle early, restoring reimbursement levels for DEXA bone density scans, and revisiting screening guidelines to support early bone health monitoring and intervention.

- **Caregiver Needs.**
  Women represent more than 60% of caregivers in the United States and play an essential role in the U.S. health care system. While caregiving is rewarding, it often takes a toll on an individuals' physical, mental, financial, and emotional health. There is more that can be done in the United States to support informal caregivers – from improving caregivers' access to patient records, when necessary, to providing support to help offset the cost for caregiving responsibilities, such as providing transportation or travel reimbursement or supporting skills training. SWHR is in favor of policies that assist informal caregivers and ease the financial toll of caregiving.

- **Heart Disease.**
  Heart disease is the leading cause of death for women in the United States. Despite decades of progress, the U.S. heart health landscape is fraught with persistent challenges, spanning gaps in sex differences research of cardiovascular disease to challenges with public and provider education and barriers to accessing care. SWHR supports policies that could mitigate the risk of heart disease, including raising public awareness of heart disease, prioritizing heart disease research funding, addressing gender bias in heart health through training health professionals, and establishing distinct risk models for men and women.

- **Maternal Health.**
  Maternal mortality rates in the United States are higher than anywhere else in the developed world, and the majority of pregnancy-related deaths are preventable. SWHR supports efforts to address this crisis, including but not limited to increasing access to maternity care in rural and underserved areas and extending Medicaid coverage for women to one year postpartum.

- **Mental Health.**
  Mental health is a critical component of overall health. Factors such as hormones, gender-based violence, caregiving responsibilities, and socioeconomic stressors contribute to higher rates of depression and anxiety among women. SWHR supports policies that integrate mental health into primary care, expand access to behavioral health services, strengthen the mental health workforce, and increase funding for research to better understand sex-specific mental health needs and to develop effective, evidence-based interventions tailored to women's experiences.

- **Metabolism.**
  Metabolic health plays a crucial role in preventing chronic diseases such as diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and obesity, which can manifest differently for women across the lifespan. SWHR supports policies that promote research on sex-specific metabolic differences; expand access to preventive services, treatments, and lifestyle interventions tailored to women's

needs; and integrate metabolic health education into clinical care to support comprehensive, gender-responsive approaches to disease prevention and management.

- **Menopause.**
  Menopause is a pivotal life stage that affects the health and well-being of millions of women, yet it remains under-researched and under-discussed, and it is often inadequately addressed in health care. The hormonal changes associated with menopause can impact cardiovascular health, bone density, metabolic function, brain health, and quality of life. SWHR supports elevating menopause as a public health priority and the enactment of policies that advance research on menopause and its long-term health implications, improve provider education to ensure women receive the care they need, and expand access to affordable treatments, including hormone therapy and innovative alternatives, when appropriate.

- **Uterine Health.**
  One in 10 women have endometriosis and over 70% of women will develop uterine fibroids before age 50. Yet, these and other uterine health conditions are often underdiagnosed and have historically been under-researched and under-funded. These conditions can cause chronic pain, abnormal menstrual bleeding, and infertility, and can significantly impact quality of life. Several uterine health conditions also disproportionately affect women of color. Despite their prevalence, gaps remain in understanding the causes, risk factors, and effective treatments for many uterine health issues. SWHR supports policies that expand research funding and promote early diagnosis through improved screening and awareness for these conditions.

About SWHR

Society for Women's Health Research

The Society for Women's Health Research (SWHR) is a national nonprofit and thought leader dedicated to advancing women's health through science, policy, and education while promoting research on sex differences to optimize women's health. Founded in 1990 by a group of physicians, medical researchers, and health advocates, SWHR is making women's health mainstream by addressing unmet needs and research gaps in women's health. Thanks to SWHR's efforts, women are now routinely included in most major medical research studies and more scientists are considering sex as a biological variable in their research. Visit www.swhr.org for more information.