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Biden Administration Establishes First Initiative On Women's Health

by [Brian Bossetta](#)

First Lady Jill Biden leads White House effort to find ways for federal government to boost women's health. First-of-its-kind initiative will focus on enhancing research into women's health issues.

Women in the US have been neglected in health research far too long, even though women outnumber men, says President Biden in announcing an initiative seeking to change that.

On Monday, Biden established the first White House Initiative on Women's Health Research, which focuses all government health agencies on matters of women's health.

"I'm setting up this group that within 45 days, all the government agencies that have anything to do with health have to report on exactly what they're doing now with regard to women's health and the suggestions they may have on how to deal with it," Biden said before signing the memorandum establishing the group on 14 November.

The agencies required to report back to the president include the National Institutes of Health, the departments of Health and Human Services, Veterans Affairs, and Defense . Specifically, these agencies must report back to Biden "what they can do collectively to improve women's health."

First Lady Jill Biden, who will lead the effort, credited Maria Shriver for helping bring the initiative to fruition.

"Every woman I know has a story about leaving her doctor's office with more questions than answers." said Jill Biden.

This happens, the president added, not because doctors are purposely misleading their female patients but rather because there is simply not enough research to provide them with more

information on how to best manage and treat even common women's health conditions.

"In 2023, that is unacceptable," Biden said. "Our new White House initiative on women's health research will help change that by identifying bold solutions to uncover the answers that every woman and her family deserve."

The president also been active in promoting reproductive health care. In June, he announced the "Executive Order on Strengthening Access to Affordable, High-Quality Contraception and Family Planning Services" as the administration's third on reproductive health care access since the Supreme Court's June 2022 decision in *Dobbs v. Jackson (Mississippi) Women's Health Organization* allowing states to regulate access to abortion services. (Also see "[Biden Calls For Expanding Access To Reproductive Health Care, Including OTC Oral Contraceptives](#)" - HBW Insight, 23 Jun, 2023.)

'Drastic Gaps' Have Consequences

The initiative will be chaired by Carolyn Mazure, who comes to the White House from the Yale School of Medicine. Mazure will coordinate the initiative on behalf of the Office of the First Lady and the Gender Policy Council (GPC) established by the Biden administration to advance gender equality.

"Women make up more than half the population. But for too long, they've been underrepresented when it comes to health research and the money spent on that research," Biden said. "That's going to change today."

The "drastic" gaps in funding research for women's health is not just about optics, according to the White House, but represents serious health consequences for women across the US.

"To achieve scientific breakthroughs and strengthen our ability to prevent, detect, and treat diseases, we have to be bold." – President Biden

Lack of investment in women's health, limits clinicians understanding of how various conditions and diseases predominantly impact women or affect them uniquely, such as heart disease, Biden said. The US needs to fundamental change in how it approaches and funds women's health research.

A prime example of the disparity in research and study of heart disease in women is the EMPOWER CAD trial that Shockwave Medical announced this summer. The first of its kind study will consist of 400 women with coronary artery disease to evaluate positive results in men and women from earlier studies with Shockwave's C2 coronary IVL catheter can be replicated in a large cohort of female patients undergoing a percutaneous coronary intervention.

As that study noted, heart disease kills more women than any other disease, including breast and ovarian cancers, despite many women being unaware of how vulnerable they are to heart disease. Further, symptoms of heart disease often present different in men than women leading many women to go undiagnosed making potential more deadly. (Also see "[Shockwave Begins First All-Female Study Of Coronary Interventions](#)" - Medtech Insight, 26 Jul, 2023.)

Marissa Fayer, founder and CEO of HERhealthEQ, a global non-profit focused on women's health equity in emerging and developing countries, told *Medtech Insight* she was excited about the announcement because often there is too much talk and not enough action concerning equity in women's health.

"I'm particularly excited that there are concrete expectations within the next 45-days to begin taking action on," Fayer said. "The research that occurs in the US will have far-reaching global impact for all women, and it's exciting to have the US taking a stand to put in the hard work and money to improve women's lives for generations."

At the Medical Design & Manufacturing East conference in New York earlier in 2023, Fayer pointed out that lack of funding and focus on women's health, particularly in the medtech sector, is not just hurting women, but business.

The market for women's devices, she noted, is expected to grow from \$35bn in 2021 to nearly \$63bn by 2028. Still, industry is slow to seize this opportunity. Only 1% of health care research and innovation, according to McKinsey & Company, is invested in female-specific conditions outside of oncology, leaving large potential sources of revenue untapped. Essentially, industry is only manufacturing and creating medical devices and products for half the population.

"To achieve scientific breakthroughs and strengthen our ability to prevent, detect, and treat diseases, we have to be bold," Biden said, adding that through the initiative the administration will do all it can "to drive innovation in women's health and close research gaps."

Along with directing the various health agencies to report back to the administration within 45 days, Biden's directive also requires them to set priority areas of focus – "ranging from heart attacks in women to menopause" – where additional investments in research could be transformative.

The initiative will explore public-private partnerships and engage private and philanthropic leaders to drive innovation and ensure the combined power of public, private, and philanthropic sectors advances research on women's health.

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