HADASSAH'S
DOMESTIC ADVOCACY AGENDA
WOMEN, HEALTH & FAMILY

GENDER-BALANCED MEDICAL RESEARCH

A multitude of diseases, including heart disease, the number one killer of women[1] in the U.S., are often misdiagnosed or overlooked entirely in women. Until 1994, the U.S. National Institutes of Health (one of the world's biggest funders of biomedical research) excluded women from early studies of most drugs. Though mainly for safety reasons, this prohibition meant there was little information about the effects of diagnoses, as well as drugs and other therapies, on women.

While the last two decades have seen tremendous progress toward gender equity, particularly in late-stage clinical trials, foundational, early-stage medical studies still tend to use more male animals than female ones, or fail to take sex differences into consideration at all in research. While the Institute of Medicine has said that "every cell has a sex," most studies ignore this factor altogether.[2]

This can have negative consequences for women's health. Researchers at Brigham and Women's Hospital recently said, "Medical research that is gender-neutral or skewed to male physiology puts women at risk for missed opportunities for prevention, incorrect diagnoses, misinformed treatments, sickness and even death."[3] And the practical effects are clear – recently it was discovered that women have been prescribed a recommended dose of one popular sleep aid that was twice the amount needed.

The National Institutes of Health is taking positive steps to correct this, and Congress has become involved, pushing for better policies that will lead to better health outcomes for women. There is more to be done, however, to make sure that all research – from the most basic, cellular-level studies to late-stage clinical trials – is designed to account for differences between the sexes and yields therapies and cures that are tailored appropriately for women and men.

RECENT POLICY ACTION

Hadassah supports the bipartisan Research for All Act (H.R. 2101), introduced in April 2015 by Rep. Jim Cooper (D-TN) and Rep. Cynthia Lummis (R-WY), which would help achieve gender equity in U.S.-funded biomedical research and ensure that medical advances help men and women equally. In 2014, Reps. Louise Slaughter (D-NY), Rosa DeLauro (D- CT), and Lois Capps (D-CA) initiated a letter signed by 19 Congressional colleagues calling on the NIH to disclose demographic information pertaining to all clinical trials, in an effort to improve equity in research. Rep. Nita Lowey (D-NY), Rep. Rosa DeLauro and Sen. Elizabeth Warren (D-MA), along with other Senators and Representatives, also requested a Government Accountability Office report on gender equity in medical research.

HADASSAH'S WORK

Hadassah is the founder of the Gender Equity in Medical Research (GEM) Initiative, a new and growing group of organizations working to ensure that medical research benefits everyone.

[1] Published by Centers for Disease Control at http://1.usa.gov/1iAuCUt.
[2] Published by Institute of Medicine at http://bit.ly/1merF7Z.
[3] Published by Brigham and Women's Hospital at http://bit.ly/1cxJZFr.

Hadassah has a tradition of policy and advocacy work in women's health, leading targeted and effective campaigns. Today, Every Beat Counts: Hadassah's Heart Health Program™ educates women about risks, prevention, and detection of heart disease, the number one cause of death among women in the U.S. We also implement Check It Out®, a breast cancer awareness program for teens and adults of both genders. The campaign is focused on disease prevention and screening for the purpose of early detection and treatment.

Hadassah Medical Organization's medical expertise has led the way on women's health research for decades, including the areas of gender-balanced medical research and access to basic, preventive care.

PREVENTIVE CARE

All women need at least one well-woman visit a year, while some will need two or three.[4] Yet research demonstrates that in the U.S. rates of usage for preventive measures – from regular screenings for diabetes and mammograms to more frequent pap smears and testing for STDs – are poor.[5]

Women now have access to a multitude of preventive services – from cancer and chronic condition screenings to vaccinations, sexual health and pregnancy services, and healthy behaviors counseling. Yet four in ten women are unaware of services covered by the new health care laws.[6]

Furthermore, though a majority of women receive checkups, the opportunity for preventive counseling is often missed. Care providers are often at a loss as to what to include in preventive health care visits and services are often fragmented between family medicine practices, OB-GYNs, pediatricians, and others. This requires women to be educated consumers on behalf of themselves and their families.[5]

To address preventive care for women, Rep. Ami Bera (D-CA) sponsored the *Women's Preventive Health Awareness Campaign (H.R. 2355),* which would create a national public outreach and educational campaign to raise patient and provider awareness of women's preventive health. The bill codifies a variety of principles including the importance of well-woman exams and access to reproductive health and maternal care. A similar awareness campaign has also been included in the *21st Century Women's Health Act,* introduced in the Senate in March 2015.

TAKE ACTION!

- Urge your legislators to co-sponsor the Research for All Act and the *Women's Preventive Health Awareness Campaign.* Visit Hadassah's National Action Center to send letters to your members of Congress. You can also find a draft letter to the editor, sample social media posts and graphics that you can use to promote Hadassah's campaign to ensure medical research benefits everyone.
- Check out our advocacy website for exciting updates, and sign up to receive regular policy alerts and next steps for how you can get involved.

[4] Published by Institute of Medicine at http://bit.ly/1mKmIsC.
[5] Published by Partnership for Prevention http://bit.ly/1skhqXV.
[6] Published by Kaiser Foundation at http://bit.ly/1uJNhQt.

hadassah.org/advocate
facebook.com/hadassah
@Hadassah

The information and content contained herein are as of May 2015 and are intended for educational purposes only. We encourage you to contact our sources directly for additional information.

HADASSAH THE WOMEN'S ZIONIST ORGANIZATION OF AMERICA, INC.

©2015 Hadassah, The Women's Zionist Organization of America, Inc. Hadassah is a registered trademark of Hadassah, The Women's Zionist Organization of America, Inc.

HADASSAH
the power of women who DO™