



March 28, 2024

The Honorable Joseph R. Biden, Jr.  
President of the United States  
1600 Pennsylvania Ave, NW  
Washington, DC 20500

Re: Executive Order on Advancing Women's Health Research and Innovation

Dear President Biden,

On behalf of the American College of Physicians (ACP), I would like to commend the Administration for its recent Executive Order on Advancing Women's Health Research and Innovation. ACP believes that women's health research has long been underfunded and neglected and that robust investment in women's health research is essential for understanding and addressing those health issues that disproportionately and particularly impact women. The College applauds the Administration for its commitment to prioritizing women's health research. ACP believes undertaking the actions outlined in this executive order will improve the health and well-being of women throughout the country for generations to come.

ACP is the largest medical specialty organization and the second largest physician membership society in the United States. ACP members include 161,000 internal medicine physicians, related subspecialists, and medical students. Internal medicine physicians are specialists who apply scientific knowledge, clinical expertise, and compassion to the preventive, diagnostic, and therapeutic care of adults across the spectrum from health to complex illness.

Many troubling trends are affecting the overall well-being and survival of women in the U.S.: women are nearly twice as likely as men to be diagnosed with depression, are more likely to die as a result of a heart attack, and comprise 78% of all people with autoimmune diseases.<sup>1</sup> Given that women make up more than half of the U.S. population and roughly half of the U.S. workforce, there is a broad societal interest in women's health research and its applications. Despite this, research gaps continue to contribute to disparities in health outcomes and experiences for women. For example, one study of National Institutes of Health (NIH) research

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<sup>1</sup> Understanding Influences of Sex and Gender in Health and Disease [Internet]. National Institutes of Health Office of Research on Women's Health; Available from: <https://orwh.od.nih.gov/sex-gender/sex-and-gender-in-health-and-disease>

grants found that of grants made available for diseases that primarily impact one gender, three-quarters of grants were for those diseases that impact men, with a funding to disease burden level that is twice as much for diseases that primarily impact men compared to those that impact women.<sup>2</sup>

ACP is concerned about the lack of research looking at the health issues that disproportionately and distinctly impact female populations. Because clinical trial research has historically been focused on health issues and treatments that particularly impact men, and have included an underrepresentation of female participants, there is a dearth of knowledge of how specific diseases and treatments uniquely impact women and how sex may function as a biological variable. Although efforts to increase female participation in clinical studies have improved representation of women in research generally, women continue to be underrepresented in oncology, neurology, immunology, urology, hematology, cardiology, and nephrology clinical trials.<sup>3</sup> Policymakers must prioritize improving the recruitment, participation, and retention of women in clinical trials. Additional research attention must be focused on how sex and gender affect disease, disease treatment, and social factors as well as disease expression, health outcomes, and treatment protocols. This research must also reflect the broader demographic makeup of the U.S. and be inclusive of those of various races, ethnicities, sexual orientations, gender identities, ages, and disability status.

ACP applauds the Administration for its recent executive order and believes this order is a significant development in pushing a unified and coordinated federal approach to acting upon women's health issues and ultimately spurring critical, cutting-edge women's health research. In this executive order, the secretaries of the Departments of Defense, Agriculture, Health and Human Services, Veterans Affairs, the Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency, and the Director of the National Science Foundation are directed to improve research and data standards across their agencies' supported research to better incorporate and study women's health. Such actions may include the consideration of women's health in research proposals, applications, evaluations, and reporting, as appropriate, as well as identifying ways to improve the participation of women in clinical trials. This order also establishes a subgroup to coordinate actions across these agencies. Agency leaders are also directed to identify additional potential funding needs as well as regulatory, budgetary, and statutory changes that may be needed to facilitate the initiation of new women's health research. These agencies are directed to prioritize grantmaking and other funding that furthers women's health research, with a particular focus on race-, ethnicity-, age-, socioeconomic-, disability-, and environmental-based disparities, women's midlife health, and translational research that can result in improved health outcomes.

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<sup>2</sup> Mirin AA. Gender Disparity in the Funding of Diseases by the U.S. National Institutes of Health. *J Womens Health (Larchmt)*. 2021 Jul;30(7):956-963. doi: 10.1089/jwh.2020.8682. Epub 2020 Nov 27. PMID: 33232627; PMCID: PMC8290307.

<sup>3</sup> Steinberg JR, Turner BE, Weeks BT, Magnani CJ, Wong BO, Rodriguez F, Yee LM, Cullen MR. Analysis of Female Enrollment and Participant Sex by Burden of Disease in US Clinical Trials Between 2000 and 2020. *JAMA Netw Open*. 2021 Jun 1;4(6):e2113749. doi: 10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2021.13749. PMID: 34143192; PMCID: PMC8214160.

ACP strongly believes that all women should have access to high-quality care that promotes positive health outcomes throughout all stages of life. Ensuring access to this care necessitates that adequate women's health research continues to be undertaken to produce the knowledge and treatments necessary to provide such care. Gaps in women's health research not only are detrimental to the health of women but also prevent policymakers from properly addressing sex or gender in outcomes measures or understanding the return on federal investments into biomedical research. This executive order is a much needed and welcomed first step to improving comprehensive understanding of the science behind women's health and health needs, as well as delivering the resources necessary to effectively address women's health issues and take steps to reduce negative outcomes. ACP further urges the Administration to work with Congress to authorize and appropriate sufficient funds to fulfill the President's call for \$12 billion in new women's health research funding to support dedicated NIH interdisciplinary women's health research programs nationwide and produce the next wave of groundbreaking women's health research.

We greatly appreciate your efforts to lead on policies that aim to improve women's health and health research. Should you have any questions, or if we can be of further assistance, please contact Josh Serchen, Associate of Health Policy, at [jserchen@acponline.org](mailto:jserchen@acponline.org).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Omar Atiq". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Omar T. Atiq, MD, MACP  
President