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American Psychological Association

Comments to the White House Initiative on Women's Health Research

January 22, 2024

The American Psychological Association (APA) is pleased to provide comments to the White House Initiative on Women's Health Research. APA is the leading scientific and professional organization representing psychology in the United States (U.S.), composed of more than 157,000 researchers, educators, clinicians, consultants, and students. Its mission is to promote the advancement, communication, and application of psychological science and knowledge to benefit society and improve lives. Specifically, APA's Division 38 (Society for Health Psychology) seeks to improve the lives of individuals and society by promoting health, preventing illness, and improving health care through research, practice, education, training, and advocacy.

APA Psychology is grateful for the significant contributions of First Lady Dr. Jill Biden and the White House Gender Policy Council to establish the White House Initiative on Women's Health Research, led by Dr. Carolyn Mazure. President Biden's commitment to transformative change is evident in the initiative's mission, strengths, and its aim to engage diverse stakeholders across the United States.

APA recommends adopting a population health framework to provide critical health and behavioral care to all women. Population health aims to improve the health and well-being of entire populations, including individuals within those populations, and addresses the cultural, economic, systemic, and historical contexts that influence health status, well-being, and functioning across the life span. The number and complexity of health disparities among women is alarming, and it is imperative for research in women's health to adopt a more inclusive approach encompassing all individuals. This includes elderly persons, women with disabilities, refugees, and immigrants, and racial and ethnic minoritized populations. While the White House Initiative focuses on women's health, we also recognize the importance of advancing the health and well-being of individuals who identify as non-binary, gender diverse, transgender, and gender fluid. This entails evaluating gender identity as a significant variable in both qualitative and quantitative investigations, including randomized controlled trials (RCTs), as well as in the translation and dissemination of findings.

We recommend the use of inclusive language consistent with the American Psychological Association's Inclusive Language Guide¹, the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists Statement of

¹ American Psychological Association. (2023). *Inclusive Language Guide (2nd ed.)*
<https://www.apa.org/about/apa/equity-diversity-inclusion/language-guide.pdf>



Policy on Inclusive Language², as well as guidelines from other organizations focused on the health and status of women in all our intersecting diversities.

APA Psychology recommends the federal research agenda include additional emphasis on effective translation and dissemination strategies to ensure that women's health care providers across disciplines are offering state of the art biomedical, psychosocial, and behavioral interventions to women across the life span in all of our diversities across health care settings. Additionally, we must persist in our efforts to disseminate and implement programs that foster the holistic health and well-being of women across urban, rural and frontier communities in the United States where women's needs are not adequately met.

Training and Education

APA Psychology supports expanding the education and training of the interprofessional behavioral healthcare workforce across disciplines in women's health and mental health, addressing and identifying current gaps in training across disciplines, and advancing future initiatives to close these gaps. APA recommends that the White House create a framework for comprehensive training which includes quality guidance in different content areas that is consistent with standards and best practices, the development of up to date, accessible, population-relevant, evidence-based training materials for students, residents and fellows as well as educational programs across disciplines, and for professional organizations to offer continuing education credits in the biomedical, psychosocial and health determinants of women's health and mental health concerns.

Research Priorities

The lack of strong women's health research has greatly impacted how we provide health care services. We recommend foundational research and randomized controlled trials in collaboration with diverse communities to translate, disseminate and generalize effective health promotion. We also recommend prevention and treatment interventions for women across the life span, and expanded research, translation and dissemination of women's health and mental health research to urban, rural and frontier communities and providers.

There are innumerable gaps in women's health research, which have resulted in disparities in women's health outcomes. While we won't list all of them here, a few priorities in research should be to:

- Advance research on novel and effective interventions to promote wellness among women across the span in all of our intersecting diversities
- Advance biomedical, psychosocial and behavioral research on women across the life span coping with complex and interacting chronic and life-threatening physical conditions
- Promote research on sex, gender, racial/ethnic, age and other differences in the symptoms, diagnosis, treatment options and outcomes, and prevention interventions for chronic and life-threatening physical conditions in diverse populations of women, and advance the translation

² American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists. (February 2022) Inclusive Language Statement of Policy. <https://www.acog.org/clinical-information/policy-and-position-statements/statements-of-policy/2022/inclusive-language>



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and dissemination of findings to women's health care providers across disciplines, settings and communities

- Advance research on racial and ethnic disparities among women
- Advance research on the consequences of denying women's access to safe and legal pregnancy termination, including mental health outcomes
- Promote research on causal factors associated with Black women's maternal morbidity and mortality and population-based interventions to eliminate disparities and prevent maternal mortality
- Research early identification of persons at risk for post-partum suicide and the development of effective interventions tailored to communities, as well as translation and dissemination of these prevention and treatment interventions
- Expand research on the health and mental health outcomes for mothers (and children) with access to high quality and affordable childcare
- Increase research on the health and mental health outcomes for mothers (and children) of paid maternal leave policies in the workplace
- Increase research investigating the impact of women and varied work settings and roles, and the impact of associated stress on health, especially heart disease, migraines/headaches, persistent post-concussion symptoms, autoimmune conditions, Long Covid, and vestibular conditions. This research should include women in unregulated work environments (e.g., domestic work), and randomized controlled trials on environmental conditions should be conducted to enhance performance and health during shift work, e.g., noise, lighting, technological supports.
- Advance family focused research to reduce intimate partner violence throughout the life span

Summary

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on these critical women's health research issues. APA recommends that the White House Initiative on Women's Health Research create a framework for including women's health and mental health in training and education; expand funding for women's health research across the life span inclusive of all women/persons; and prioritize translating research to practice using a population health approach. It is past time, and vital, that we make focused investments in women's health research, and we look forward to partnering with you on this pivotal journey to improve the health and well-being of all women/persons in our country. Should you have any questions, feel free to contact Krysta Jones, Director, Congressional and Federal Relations, at knjones@apa.org.