Dear Friends and Supporters:

On March 3, 2014, we convened “Charting the Course: A National Policy Summit on the Future of Women’s Health” and brought together experts from across the country to address the issue of inequity in biomedical science. I am delighted to report that in just over four months, the Summit has been a catalyst for historic progress not seen since the passage of the landmark NIH Revitalization Act two decades ago which called for equal representation for women and minorities in clinical trials. Much of that ongoing progress is detailed here in this first quarterly issue of Women’s Health Equity Forum which brings news and information on this important topic to a growing list of thought leaders.

I sincerely thank all of the participants at the Summit for being a part of a national awakening that led to an amazing series of immediate actions detailed here. There is much work ahead in our journey along the road to health equity and with it, major improvements in the health of all people.

--- Dr. Paula A. Johnson, MD, MPH

New Report

Sex-Specific Research: Why Women’s Health Can’t Wait

Our report, Sex-Specific Research: Why Women’s Health Can’t Wait, released on the day of the Summit, provided evidence of the vast inequities that continue to exist in medical research. It also outlined clear recommendations, via a Women’s Health Equity Action Plan, to address inequity in medical research including: holding federal agencies accountable, promoting transparency and disclosure, expanding sex-based research and calling for a gender-based lens in medical education.

From Stagnation to Acceleration: A National Conversation is Reborn

After many years of stagnation, a national conversation was reborn and the results of the Summit and report have been swift and impactful.

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) announced a new federal policy that will require researchers to expand inclusion of female cells and lab animals in NIH-funded medical research.

Members of Congress, including Senators Elizabeth Warren and Kirsten Gillibrand, requested that the Government Accountability Office (GAO) study whether or not the level of participation of women in clinical trials is sufficient for researchers to provide meaningful results. The GAO has agreed to start the study.

Congressmen Henry Waxman and Frank Pallone requested a hearing to examine the progress of health research on women and minority groups over the past several decades.

U.S. Senator Debbie Stabenow led a group of bipartisan women senators in sending a letter to FDA, urging that they include a strategy for including more women and minorities in clinical trials to ensure the safety and effectiveness of new drugs and medical devices. Congresswomen Lois Capps and Herrera Beutler submitted a similar letter to the FDA, signed by a total of twenty-seven Women’s Caucus members.

Congressman Jim Cooper (D-TN) - proposed legislation - The Research for All Act - to address the inequities outlined in our report.

Congresswoman Rosa DeLauro hosted and we participated in a Capitol Hill briefing on the importance of examining sex differences and how Congress can facilitate policy solutions.

The Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC) reported on the findings and recommendations of the report with the article - New threads Call for Improving Gender Equity in Biomedical Research.
The Media Responds

The media, including USA Today, and the scientific communities continue to publicize the report and the action plan including positive reactions from prestigious journals such as Science and a favorable editorial in The Lancet, contributing to a national conversation on the subject. For a full list of media coverage, please click here.

“Champions of Women’s Health”

Click here for a video that honors pioneers and supporters of the NIH Revitalization Act.

Featuring: Former U.S. Senator Olympia Stowe, U.S. Representative Joseph P. Kennedy III (MA), U.S. Representative Henry Waxman (CA), Dr. Betsy Nabel, Dr. Vivian Pinn, Phyllis Greenberger, Dr. Paula Johnson, Former U.S. Representative Connie Morella (MD), and Former U.S. Representative Patricia Schroeder (CO).

Related Women’s Health Research

Click here for more information on how the Connors Center is working to close the knowledge gap in the understanding of predictors of women’s health and wellness from a lifespan perspective.

Don't leave women's health to chance. Take action!

Get the facts

Read Sex-Specific Medical Research, a report on gender inequity in biomedical research, and learn how you can affect change.

Raise your voice

Ask your doctor if your medical condition presents differently in women and men.

Spread the word

Share the report with those you love and those who can influence change.

Support more research

Donate to the Connors Center for Women’s Health and Gender Biology to fuel research, clinical care, leadership, and advocacy on behalf of women’s health.

An Issue That Unites Us All: National Advocacy Groups Weigh in on Sex Specific Research

The action plan has become a rallying cry for national advocacy groups including The American Heart Association, The Lung Cancer Alliance, and Women Against Alzheimer’s, who have written a Huffington Post op-ed in support of our vision, to chart the course toward integrity in medical science.

“We know that men and women present differently for many diseases and may react differently to treatment strategies and drug dosages. To ignore these differences undermines the quality and integrity of science and medicine and the ability to deliver the right care to the right patient at the right time.”

Laurie Fenton Ambrose
President and Chief Executive Officer of Lung Cancer Alliance (LCA)

Nancy Brown
CEO, American Heart Association

Meryl Comer Headshot
Award-Winning Reporter, President/CEO of the Geoffrey Beene Foundation Alzheimer’s Initiative

Left: Tom Ashbrook from NPR moderating a panel with Vivian Pinn from NIH, Rita Redberg from JAMA, and Freda Lewis-Hall from Pfizer.

About the Connors Center

Connors Center for Women’s Health and Gender Biology was established at Brigham’s and Women’s Hospital in 2002 to develop collaborative efforts in women’s health. The Connors Center for Women’s Health and Gender Biology has a commitment to improving the health of women and transforming their care through the discovery, dissemination and integration of knowledge of women’s health and sex and gender-based differences and the application of this knowledge to the delivery of care.