

most important
for Women's Health
Director, Office on Women's Health
US Dept of Health & Human Services

Progress in Advancing Women's Health An Administration Report Card

Improving women's health is a top Administration priority. Through government-sponsored public health interventions, today women live 30 years longer than they did at the turn of the century. In the year 1900, women died on average at age 48. Today, women die on average at age 79. The major killers of American women are now chronic diseases, including heart disease, cancer, stroke, chronic lung disease, and diabetes.

Since 1990, alarming inequities in women's health have been exposed — inequities that include the failure to include women in research studies; the inadequate attention to gender differences in the causes, treatment, and prevention of disease; the lack of funding for women's health concerns; the lack of public and health care professional education on women's health issues; the lack of women's access to health care services; and the dearth of women in senior medical and scientific positions in our Nation's health and research organizations.

Today, this Administration is writing a new national prescription to improve women's health. The result is the greatest focus on women's health in the history of our country.



A New National Focus on Women's Health

Today, a new national focus on women's health is brightening the health futures for American women. With funding for women's health over \$2 billion this year in the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) alone — an increase of over \$650 million in just three years — the Administration is intensifying research, developing innovative public and health care professional education programs, and designing targeted health care services for women.

- ✓ Federal departments, agencies, and offices as well as private sector organizations have been mobilized to advance women's health.
- ✓ To coordinate and stimulate these efforts, a new senior level health position was created. The first Deputy Assistant Secretary for Women's Health was appointed to direct the U.S. Public Health Service's Office on Women's Health that coordinates and stimulates women's health research, service delivery, and education programs across the agencies and offices of the Department of Health and Human Services.
- ✓ For the first time, all of the HHS offices, agencies, and regions have established offices and/or coordinators of women's health to stimulate new initiatives on women's health issues.
- ✓ President Clinton directed the establishment of the National Action Plan on Breast Cancer — an innovative public-private partnership to coordinate a national strategy that is catalyzing action in research, service delivery, and education about this disease. Funding for breast cancer programs has increased from \$90 million in 1990 to over \$600 million today.

Intensifying Research and Improving Treatments

Since 1950, we have learned more about health and disease than in the entire history of medicine. After years of neglecting women's health, advances from new research are leading to improved diagnosis, treatment, and prevention of disease and disability in women of all ages.

- ✓ Women and minorities are now included as subjects in government-supported research and in the evaluation of drugs and medical devices. In addition, research is now addressing both gender and racial/ethnic differences in the causes, treatment, and prevention of diseases such as breast cancer, HIV/AIDS, and heart disease.
- ✓ Research supported by the National Institutes of Health (NIH) is now focusing on the causes, treatment, and prevention of a broad spectrum of diseases and health concerns affecting women across the life cycle including heart disease, breast and ovarian cancer, and AIDS. Major studies are underway to examine adolescent and mid-life behaviors and their effect on future disease and disability. The Women's Health Initiative — the largest clinical trial ever conducted — is investigating the major risk factors for diseases in older women and evaluating the effects of hormone replacement therapy and behavioral interventions, including diet and exercise, on the health of older women.
- ✓ Researchers have identified genes that increase susceptibility to diseases including breast and ovarian cancer and Alzheimer's disease. The promise of these discoveries is the development of more effective treatments and one day, a method to repair gene mutations so the disease does not develop in the first place.

- ✓ Imaging technologies from the defense, space, and intelligence communities are being adapted to detect breast cancer and other diseases in women earlier and with greater accuracy.
- ✓ Life-saving experimental cancer-fighting medications are now on a fast track for FDA review and approval so that cancer patients will have more treatment options.
- ✓ Reproductive health initiatives are being implemented including: efforts to reduce the alarming high teenage and unintended pregnancy rates; developing new and more effective means of contraception; developing new microbicides to protect against STDs and AIDS; examining the causes and designing interventions for infertility; and evaluating alternative treatments for hysterectomy for non-cancerous uterine conditions such as endometriosis and fibroids.

Increasing Public and Health Care Professional Education

To help American women to lead long and healthier lives, new educational initiatives are underway to enhance knowledge of women's health issues and to improve the care that women receive by making sure health care professionals have up-to-date information and training on women's health issues.

- ✓ A National Women's Health Information Center — a comprehensive resource clearinghouse — is being established to provide the public, health care professionals, and researchers with access to state-of-the-art Federal and private sector information about women's health via a toll-free number and the Internet.
- ✓ A nationwide, 24-hour domestic violence hot-line, 1-800-799-SAFE, is providing immediate crisis information and assistance, counseling, and local shelter referrals to women across the country.
- ✓ The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's National Women's Resource Center provides information and referral services (1-800-354-8824) addressing the prevention and treatment of both mental illness and substance abuse.
- ✓ *Healthy Women 2000*, a series of health education conferences and educational materials sponsored by the U.S. Public Health Service's Office on Women's Health, focuses on critical health issues affecting women in our country today and on the promotion of good health.
- ✓ A video and health promotion education curriculum to encourage healthy behavior among young women has been developed and distributed to college campuses nationwide.
- ✓ Educational campaigns are underway to inform health care professionals and counsel pregnant women about HIV testing and treatments to reduce the rate of HIV transmission from mother to child.
- ✓ A first medical school model curricula on women's health issues has been developed to bring women's health into the mainstream of medical education. Also, a first of its kind directory of women's health residency and fellowship opportunities in medicine has been prepared and widely disseminated.