

# Invest in the Women's Health Research Workforce

**Women contribute approximately \$7.6 trillion annually to the United States gross domestic product, and this does not include indirect contributions from unpaid work and caregiving.** Time out of work related to preventable health conditions in women accounts for billions of dollars in lost productivity each year. Unfortunately, the health of women in the United States lags that of women in other high-income countries. In the United States, women were largely excluded from medical research until 1993, and this has led to persistent gaps in the understanding, prevention, and treatment of conditions that predominantly impact women. The United States has not poised itself to make progress on these issues, as there are disproportionately fewer women's health researchers compared to conditions that predominantly affect men, and less funding dedicated to conditions that impact women when compared to conditions that impact men. It is critical that we foster a robust women's health research pipeline.

■ **This is a public priority.** In a 2021 NIH opportunity for public comment related to women's health, 73% of respondents voiced public concern regarding chronic debilitating conditions in women. As the United States population continues to age, the prevalence of the population limited by one or more chronic debilitating condition that disproportionately impact women will increase.

■ **Current funding levels are inadequate, given the expected population increase.** Despite the expected population increase, there is a persistent funding gap related to women's health research. Approximately only 8% of NIH grant budget is allocated to women's health research. This leads to fewer high-quality studies to advance women's health, and fewer opportunities for women's health researchers to receive funding. With fewer competent women's health researchers, there is increased risk of burnout and attrition.

■ **Funding and fostering a women's health research workforce can decrease the gaps in health outcomes noted between women in the United States and women in other high-income countries.** Training women's health

researchers can help regain the ground lost from being left out of medical research for decades.

## HOW CONGRESS CAN HELP

AUGS urges Congress to invest in and expand training and mentorship programs to strengthen the pipeline of physician-scientists dedicated to women's health research.

■ **Congress must invest in the future of early-career physician-scientists focused on women's health research.** Investment in the workforce will facilitate scientific breakthroughs to improve the treatment and prevention of conditions disproportionately impacting women.

■ **Congress should expand existing National Institutes of Health (NIH) workforce programs.** Bolstering programs such as BIRCWH, WRHR and RSDP will help equip the country with an adequate women's health research workforce.

**Building Interdisciplinary Research Careers in Women's Health (BIRCWH) program:** Provides training for early-career researchers with MDs or PhDs and matches them with senior researchers based on shared research interests.

- Scholars have increased research productivity and grant funding after participating

**Women Reproductive Health Research (WRHR) Career Development program:** Awards training grants to early-career researchers to foster career development

- 40% of scholars go on to successfully compete for subsequent NIH grants

**Reproductive Scientist Development Program (RSDP):** Provides career development for early-career OB/GYNs who are pursuing academic medicine and research.