

Gender gaps in cardiovascular disease diagnosis and treatment persist, report says

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Credit: AI-generated image

Cardiovascular disease is the leading cause of death for women, and gaps in care and access persist between women and men. Addressing those gaps could lead to an increase of at least 1.6 million years of quality life and boost the U.S. economy by \$28 billion annually by 2040, according to a report published by the American Heart Association and the

McKinsey Health Institute (MHI).

To help close these gaps and foster gender-specific cardiovascular disease science into implementation, the Association, observing 100 years of lifesaving service as the world's leading nonprofit organization focused on heart and [brain health](#) for all, also announced the creation of a new venture fund.

["The state of women's heart health in the US: A path to improved health and financial outcomes"](#) explores how cardiovascular disease disproportionately affects women in the United States and presents opportunities to close the heart health gap.

According to the paper, one of the main contributors to this gap is a limited understanding of the biological differences between women and men, specifically surrounding how CVD manifests itself in puberty, pregnancy and menopause. Similarly, [cardiovascular research](#) and clinical studies often underrepresent women, resulting in subpar treatment outcomes.

A lack of scientific knowledge, limited gender-specific medical training, and little investment in specific research and venture funding further exacerbate this disparity. In fact, only 1% of health care research and innovation was invested in female-specific conditions outside of oncology, according to the most recent data available.

Addressing this gap could lead to an increase of at least 1.6 million years of quality life and boost the U.S. economy by \$28 billion annually by 2040. The report identifies several pathways to begin to narrow the gap, including:

- Expanding women-focused research, accelerating translation of findings and facilitating the commercialization of products and

technologies to improve women's health.

- Investing in novel approaches that serve women's health needs and leverage financial capital to target and accelerate cardiovascular, metabolic and neurologic solutions across a woman's entire lifespan;
- Improving routine health data collection, diagnostics and treatment algorithms;
- Equipping [health care providers](#) across the care continuum with training on how to identify and mitigate potential biases within the health care setting;
- Raising public awareness and tailoring prevention strategies for heart health across a woman's life span.

This report builds on research by the World Economic Forum in collaboration with McKinsey Health Institute released earlier this year.

"It is important for us to have these conversations early, because cardiovascular disease affects women of all ages and phases of life," shared Megan Greenfield, report co-author, Partner at McKinsey & Company, and Affiliated Leader at the McKinsey Health Institute.

"Take pregnancy, for example. CVD is the leading cause of maternal deaths in the U.S. Addressing the gaps that exist in care delivery, evolving medical school training, and [early childhood education](#) to reflect biological differences between men and women—are just some actions that can help close the women's heart health gap."

"We know that women's health encompasses much more than reproductive and maternal health," said Lucy Pérez, report co-author, Senior Partner at McKinsey & Company and Coleader of the McKinsey Health Institute.

"Between the disproportionate impact that cardiovascular health has on

women, also in ways that are different from men, and the major health and economic opportunity that exists to address it, expanding research and investment in women's [heart health](#) will help mitigate the negative outcomes of [cardiovascular disease](#) we're seeing in the US."

As part of its centennial, earlier this month, the [Association published](#) alarming cardiovascular health projections in the journal *Circulation*. At least six in 10 U.S. adults (61%), more than 184 million people, are expected to have some type of CVD within the next 30 years, reflecting a disease prevalence that will have a \$1.8 trillion price tag—tripling the current direct and indirect costs.

While women are projected to continue to have lower health care spending than men through 2050, the increase in costs over this period is greater in women than men. These projected trends are driven by an aging, more diverse population, along with an anticipated significant increase in chronic health risk factors including high blood pressure and obesity.

"In 1924, the physicians who founded the American Heart Association believed that better understanding of heart disease would lead to better outcomes. Today we know it's not enough to understand the disease, we also need to understand the patient," said Nancy Brown, chief executive officer of the American Heart Association.

"A woman's risk for heart disease and stroke changes over the course of her life. As the Association celebrates its centennial year, we're calling on individuals and industry leaders to join us in supporting innovative strategies that will allow [women](#) to live longer, healthier lives free from heart disease and stroke."

The new Go Red for Women Venture Fund is the second in a series of bold announcements the Association is making during its centennial

year. The first was the establishment of a [novel, longitudinal direct-to-patient registry](#) of individuals living with overweight and obesity and those prescribed treatment for weight management to provide seminal research to improve understanding of the causes and treatments for obesity, and how obesity is managed by health care professionals.

"As the Association moves into its second century of lifesaving work, we are poised to meet the new challenges head on. We are working in new and exciting ways to fill gaps in scientific research and improve how findings impact real-world care faster," said Brown.

Provided by American Heart Association

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