

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

February 5, 2024

The Honorable Jill Biden, Ed.D.
First Lady of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Dr. Biden:

We write to applaud the establishment of the first-ever *White House Initiative on Women's Health Research*. This initiative exemplifies the Biden Administration's commitment to addressing the health inequities faced by women in this country and is a historic step forward in accelerating research on the health needs of women across their lifespans. Women face several unique health conditions but few conditions impact as many women as menopause. Therefore, as you craft your recommendations, we encourage you to recognize and address the knowledge gaps regarding the menopausal transition that is experienced by both women and health care professionals. Doing so would raise public awareness of menopause, further enhance our understanding of associated body changes, and stimulate public and private research investments. As members of Congress, we look forward to reviewing your recommendations and stand ready to assist you in improving the health outcomes and quality of life of women nationwide.

The inequities in women's health research are longstanding and have downstream health and economic implications. Women's health encompasses reproduction-related health issues, like menstruation, pregnancy, childbirth, and menopause, and general conditions that impact women differently, such as migraines, coronary artery disease, and rheumatoid arthritis¹ – all of which are underfunded. Although women make up 50% of the nation's population, in recent years, only 10% of the National Institute of Health (NIH)'s \$45 billion research budget has been spent on researching women's health issues.² It was not until passage of the *National Institutes of Health Revitalization Act* in 1993 that the NIH was even required to include women and minorities in clinical trials.³ 30 years later, funding on women's health issues continues to fall short – for example, of the top 19 cancers, ovarian cancer ranks fifth in lethality, but twelfth in its funding-to-lethality ratio.⁴ Cervical cancer, another deadly and common cancer found exclusively in women, follows a similar pattern.⁵

Menopause is another condition in which improvements in its research and treatment would yield tremendous quality of life and economic benefits to both women and men in this country. While menopause is a naturally occurring phase of life that *all* women will experience if they live long enough, many women enter this transition with little or no guidance. Furthermore, only 31.3% of OBGYN residency programs have a

¹National Institute of Child Health and Human Development. (n.d.). Women's Health. Retrieved from <https://www.nichd.nih.gov/health/topics/womenshealth#:~:text=Women's%20health%20is%20a%20broad,as%20heart%20disease%20and%20diabetes>.

² Office of Research on Women's Health. (n.d.). Women's Health Coordinating Committee Executive Summary. Retrieved from https://orwh.od.nih.gov/sites/orwh/files/docs/ORWH_WHC_ExecutiveSummary508.pdf

³ National Institutes of Health. (n.d.). Guidelines on the Inclusion of Women and Minorities as Subjects in Clinical Research. Retrieved from <https://grants.nih.gov/policy/inclusion/women-and-minorities/guidelines.htm#:~:text=The%20NIH%20Revitalization%20Act%20of, and%20minorities%20in%20clinical%20research.&text=The%20statute%20includes%20a%20specific, and%20C%20in%20particular%20clinical%20trials>.

⁴ Nature. (2023). The menopause window. Retrieved from <https://www.nature.com/immersive/d41586-023-01475-2/index.html>

⁵ Ibid

menopause curriculum as part of their residency training program, leaving women, health care providers, and researchers without the educational resources they need.⁶ Although hot flashes are among the most visible and recognizable symptoms of menopause, cardiovascular disease, osteoporosis, mental health disorders, and disordered sleep are other common and debilitating symptoms.⁷ These treatable conditions affect daily functioning and cost \$1.8 billion dollars annually in lost work productivity.⁸ Given the significance and scope, it is past time to advance policies that improve menopause research and awareness.

As members of Congress, we are working tirelessly to pass legislation necessary to address the issues plaguing menopausal women in this country. The bipartisan *We're Addressing the Realities of Menopause (WARM) Act (H.R. 6743)* introduced by Reps. Blunt Rochester (D-DE) and Diana Harshbarger (R-TN) and supported by reputable organizations such as the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG), Society for Women's Health Research, Menopause Society, National Women's Health Network, National Menopause Foundation (NMF), and Women's First Research Coalition, addresses the knowledge gaps regarding menopause. This bill aims to create a menopause public awareness program highlighting symptoms, related chronic conditions, and treatments; invest in medical education and training programs to re-tool healthcare professionals in managing menopause symptoms and related conditions; and establish regional centers of excellence in menopause education that develop, evaluate, and distribute evidence-based resources. The *Menopause Research and Equity Act of 2023 (H.R. 6749)*, introduced by Reps. Yvette Clarke (D-NY) and Debbie Lesko (R-AZ) would require the NIH to evaluate the results and status of completed and ongoing research related to menopause, perimenopause, or mid-life women's health, to conduct and support additional such research.

The launch of the *White House Initiative on Women's Health Research* will be instrumental in changing the landscape of women's healthcare for the better. We welcome the opportunity to discuss the intersection of this initiative and menopause further, and we stand ready to assist in any efforts to assure menopause is prioritized. Women are valuable members of our society, and more must be done to address the conditions that primarily impact them.

Sincerely,



Lisa Blunt Rochester
Member of Congress



Yvette Clarke
Member of Congress

CC Jennifer Klein, Director, White House Gender Policy Council
Carolyn Mazure, PhD, Director, White House Initiative on Women's Health Research

⁶ Allen, J. T., Laks, S., Zahler-Miller, C., Rungruang, B. J., Braun, K., Goldstein, S. R., & Schnatz, P. F. (2023). Needs assessment of menopause education in United States obstetrics and gynecology residency training programs. *Menopause (New York, N.Y.)*, 30(10), 1002–1005. <https://doi.org/10.1097/GME.0000000000002234>

⁷ National Institute on Aging. (n.d.). What is Menopause? Retrieved from <https://www.nia.nih.gov/health/menopause/what-menopause#symptoms>

⁸ The New York Times. (2023, April 28). Menopause and the Workplace: The Impact on Women. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/04/28/well/live/menopause-symptoms-work-women.html>