



ISSUE

Women have health issues that are different from men, including pregnancy, childbirth, and menopause and some health issues that affect both men and women disproportionately affect women. These different needs require recognition, accountability and a comprehensive strategy and operational plan by the Ministry of Health and Alberta Health Services to improve Alberta women's health and safety throughout their lives.

PURPOSE

In 2023 women in Alberta, who make up more than half of its population, still do not receive equitable health care. Meeting women's health needs and eliminating gender inequality is a fundamental human right and the only fair way to improve health and health care. Doing so would provide immediate health benefits to women and, because they are the primary providers of unpaid intergenerational care in homes, communities would immediately benefit overall health and the economy. They also they represent 70% of the global health workforce, making them central to the health of the population. Their participation in the general workforce would also benefit from eliminating gender inequality. By only considering the direct health benefits of investments in women's health, we harm the broader societal benefits they provide and fail to adequately invest in programmes to improve their ability to provide those benefits. The latest evidence on the impact of investing in women's and girls' health for the health, wealth, cohesiveness, and wellbeing of society is overwhelming.

RECOMMENDATION

- It is recommended that the Government of Alberta:
 - Direct the Auditor General to prepare a report that audits:
 - the contribution that the unpaid and paid work of women makes to the economy of Alberta.
 - the gender inequalities in the funding and operation of health care programs at Alberta Health and Alberta Health Services.
 - Investigate whether current resources for education, prevention treatment and care for women's health are adequate and uniformly accessible in Alberta to women who need service.
 - Make recommendations for measures to correct inequalities and deficiencies in the health system.
 - Direct the Minister of Health to create, staff and fund an Advocate or Ombudsman for Women's Health. The position would be responsible for
 - receiving complaints about health inequalities in the Alberta health system and investigating and making recommendations to the Minister to correct these.
 - Receiving the findings and recommendations of the Auditor General and working with the responsible parties to correct the inequalities and deficiencies in the health system. They would report progress annually to the Minister who would make a summary report available to the public.
 - Receiving an annual progress report from the four new health system organizations correcting health inequalities for their female staff and patients.
 - Direct the four new health organizations to:



September 15, 2023

- create a position or assign the responsibility for reducing women’s health inequalities and assuring universal access to those services, to a sufficiently senior executive with appropriate resources.
- the executive will be responsible for creating a strategic and operational plan to improve women’s health that responds to concern raised by the Auditor General and the Advocate/Ombudsman for Women’s Health.
- this executive will be held responsible for submitting an annual progress report to the Advocate/Ombudsman for Women’s Health.

RATIONALE

- Women’s health is inclusive of a woman's different anatomy and recognizes that women have a broad set of health care needs (including sexual and reproductive health) which require specific health care services. Women also present with different symptoms and have different risk factors for many conditions. This can result in health inequalities when men’s symptoms and risk factors are assumed to be the “norm” for all health conditions.
- Despite living longer than men, women suffer higher illness and disability rates, for instance at age 65, women are estimated to spend 30% of their remaining years with a disability, compared with 19% for men.
- Indigenous women’s health is poorer than that of non-indigenous women. This is not due to their being indigenous. Race is a social and cultural concept created by society and is not an explanation for differences in health or disease. The higher rate of poor health in indigenous women is due to unequal access to health care and the drivers of health. As such it is preventable and correctable by eliminating the health inequalities that cause them.
- Given women's central role in their families, communities, and the broader economy, their health affects broader population health, and economic prosperity. Women play a critical role in the economy. In the United States nearly 60% of workers and 65% of the unpaid workforce of caregivers are women. Studies also show that healthier women and their children contribute to more productive and better educated societies.
- Studies show that when a mother dies, her family and her community experience a significant decline in health, nutrition, education, and economic outcomes.
- Women continue to encounter significant challenges in the workplace and comprise a disproportionately small percentage of leadership positions across all industries.

CONTACT:

Edmonton Zone Medical Staff Association
12230 106 Ave NW, Edmonton, AB, T5N 3Z1
Bobbie Jo Hawkes, Manager
Bobbiejo.hawkes@albertadoctors.org
Phone: 780.408.9630 ext 5630

AUTHOR:

Dr. Charlene Lyndon, MD

REFERENCES:

- Deloitte. (2021) *The future of health is female: The impact of women + health on our society.* [chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/Deloitte/us/Documents/life-sciences-health-care/us-lshc-womens-health.pdf](https://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/Deloitte/us/Documents/life-sciences-health-care/us-lshc-womens-health.pdf)