

Gender equality is good for health

No one should be sick or die because of gender inequality

Women and men differ in terms of biological make-up, power, status, norms and roles in society. Member States of the World Health Organization (WHO) and international agreements stress that these differences must be acknowledged, analysed and addressed through gender analysis and actions.

Without due attention to gender equality, health services, programmes, laws and policies will have limited effects. Women and men will not achieve their full health potential over the life-course. Women aged 20-59, for instance, will continue to die from the leading killers HIV/AIDS and maternal conditions. Furthermore, without achieving Millennium Development Goal 3 – gender equality and empowerment of women – the other MDGs will not be met by 2015.

Advancing the field of gender, women and health

The goal of the WHO Department of Gender, Women and Health (GWH) is to create, sustain and support evidence-based policies and programmes in WHO and Member States with partners to achieve gender equality, health equity and improve women's health. It does so by providing leadership in advancing the field of gender, women and health based on the principles of gender equality and health equity. GWH works to:

1. Accelerate progress in the implementation of the WHO Gender Strategy and WHO resolution WHA60.25 in WHO and in countries
2. Provide technical leadership to advance the knowledge and the application of norms and standards
3. Define a strategic focus and agenda for improving women's health in collaboration with a range of stakeholders and partners

Promoting gender equality – the WHO Gender Strategy

WHO's Constitution and its 11th General Programme of Work confirm and uphold commitments to social justice, gender equality and health equity as both a means to achieve health goals and important health goals in and of themselves.

In May 2007, the World Health Assembly, WHO's supreme decision-making body, adopted resolution WHA60.25, which urges Member States to mainstream gender in any planned health action and requests the WHO Director-General to ensure full implementation of the WHO *Strategy for integrating gender analysis and actions into the work of WHO*. WHO takes action in four strategic directions:

1. Building WHO capacity for gender analysis and planning
2. Bringing gender into the mainstream of WHO's management
3. Promoting the use of sex-disaggregated data and gender analysis
4. Establishing accountability



While GWH has been mandated to guide, facilitate and support the implementation of the WHO Gender Strategy, all WHO staff – at Headquarters, Regional and Country Offices – has a role to play in making the strategy a success.

Improving women's health over the life-course

For decades, WHO has been working to understand the range of factors affecting women's health, looking at specific population groups ranging from newborn, child and adolescent health to adult health and older age; specific health settings such as the workplace; health challenges such as universal coverage or specific health conditions such as HIV. So has GWH since its inception. The ultimate goal has, and remains, better health for women of all ages. More recently, the Organization has reviewed the latest evidence towards setting a global agenda in four action areas:



1. Building strong leadership and a coherent institutional response
2. Making health systems work better for women
3. Leveraging changes in public policy
4. Building the knowledge base and monitoring progress

“The obstacles that stand in the way of better health for women are not primarily technical or medical in nature. They are social and political, and the two go together.”

Dr Margaret Chan, WHO Director-General

GWH has been mandated to catalyse WHO's contribution to the global agenda for women's health and is supporting countries in the formulation and implementation of evidence-based policies and actions to improve women's health.

Reaching out globally for local impact

A great asset for GWH's impact on the ground is the Gender, Women and Health Network, which is composed of the department itself and gender focal points and/or units located at Headquarters, in WHO's six Regional Offices and Country Offices. The technically diverse, committed regional gender focal points collaborate with national and local authorities to reinforce the health sector response. They often do so in partnership, through evidence and tools, training and technical assistance. For instance, in 2009 alone, representatives from more than 40 countries have been trained in gender analysis and in developing responsive actions. GWH alone has published more than 50 documents: evidence, guidelines, capacity building manuals and other tools for integrating gender into policies, programmes and actions. Every region and country faces different challenges and has a different approach, adding to the diversity and effectiveness of the Network.

Partnering for stronger impact

GWH works with a robust network of organizations and professionals to advance the field of gender and public health. For example, the department:

- participated in the Expert Working Group constituted by UNAIDS to develop an Operational plan on women, girls, gender equality and HIV and is supporting its implementation in countries
- served on the *ad hoc* advisory group to develop the GAVI Alliance's Gender Strategy
- is the focal point for WHO in the Inter-Agency Network on Women and Gender Equality
- collaborates with the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights on the development of a tool to assess gender equality and human rights in national health sector strategies and
- with the Medical Women's International Association, which contributed to the development of GWH's gender mainstreaming manual for health managers.

**To partner with GWH too, contact: World Health Organization,
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