

A Guide for Protecting Women's Health

Presented by The National Partnership for Women & Families

Women should be at the forefront of every conversation about the future of our healthcare system. They play an outsized role in contributing to the health care system as decision-makers and advocates for themselves and their loved ones. But, their unique circumstances are too frequently ignored, with a variety of adverse health and economic implications for them and their families.

For example, women tend to live longer with a disability and are more likely to manage multiple chronic conditions, yet they are also more likely to forgo needed care because of high costs. The costs are critical because women across the country are struggling to overcome the consequences of persistent wage gaps across roles and industries, and secure jobs that pay higher wages. A majority of low-wage workers in the U.S. are women, even as 42 percent of mothers are the sole, or primary, breadwinners in their families.

Additionally, women make up 60 percent of all caregivers. They spend 50 percent more of their time providing care than men. But, when they seek care for themselves, women experience a "trust gap" with the health care system, which exacerbates the impact of their sicknesses. Too often, their concerns are not taken seriously by doctors and other health care professionals-- an obstacle that stems from deeply entrenched structural racism and sexism throughout the system's component parts.

Racial disparities further complicate the paradigm. It is harder for women of color to gain access to insurance coverage and preventative care. They die from cervical cancer at twice the rate of white women; experience higher rates of diabetes, hypertension, and cardiovascular disease; have higher death rates from breast cancer; and are more likely to experience sexual and interpersonal violence, all of which compounds their struggle to remain healthy and economically secure.



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This is not what equity looks like.

It is time to eliminate the barriers that women continue to face in their pursuit of whole, healthy, and economically secure lives. Women's contributions – and ability to adequately care for themselves and America's families – depend on stronger policies that promote economic equality and access to affordable, quality, comprehensive health care, including reproductive health care. As the new Congress takes office in 2019, the National Partnership for Women & Families urges policymakers to commit to the following **three goals** to make the health care system more responsive to the needs of women and families, and improve the health and well-being of all.

GOAL #1: Everyone should have access to affordable, comprehensive insurance coverage and health care.

Women and families rely on affordable, comprehensive insurance coverage to provide access to care and provide economic security if they get sick or need to see a doctor. All women should have access to health care and insurance coverage, whether through Medicaid, Medicare, CHIP, the Marketplaces, their employer, or other sources of comprehensive coverage. Comprehensive insurance coverage increases access to care and use of preventive care, primary care, treatment for chronic conditions, as well as the financial security of knowing you can afford care if you get sick.

Policymakers can reduce the financial burden of health care for all women and families by:

- Working toward universal coverage for all women and families
- Providing health coverage that meets the needs of women and families, including coverage for abortion and comprehensive reproductive health care services.

GOAL #2: Health outcomes should be the same for everyone living in the United States.

Historic and ongoing systemic racism, sexism, and discrimination is a fundamental cause of health disparities in the United States. In order to eliminate these disparities so that everyone has an opportunity to live a long, healthy, and productive life, we need policies that will meaningfully advance health equity.

Policymakers can advance health equity by working to:

- Promote unbiased, culturally sensitive, whole person care.
- Eliminate health disparities by prohibiting discrimination.



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- Eliminate maternal health care disparities so that all pregnant people can thrive during pregnancy, childbirth and in the postpartum period.

GOAL #3: Everyone deserves a health care system that meets their needs.

Women are more likely than men to report facing barriers to accessing care, such as not being able to get an appointment soon enough or not being able to access health services during working hours. Women also are more likely to manage multiple chronic conditions and are at risk for being misdiagnosed for serious health conditions, such as strokes and heart attacks. Moreover, too often, women report feeling that they are not being listened to or taken seriously by our health care system. To improve value in health care, systems should be structured to better meet people's needs. We recommend that policymakers:

- Establish infrastructure to listen to women and take their concerns seriously.
- Provide high-quality, unbiased, culturally sensitive health care, including reproductive and maternity care.
- Transform our health care system to deliver high quality, coordinated, patient- and family-centered care.

Women Need Policymakers to Act Now

We urge policymakers to advance progress for women and families. We need policies that expand opportunities for women and promote the security and well-being of our nation's families. For more than 45 years, we have promoted access to quality, affordable and comprehensive health care. We are working to make that vision a reality by helping put women and families at the forefront of every conversation about the future of our health care system. But, we can't do it alone. Women need Congress to help create a high-performing health care system that values women's lives, and their outsized role in securing a thriving society for generations to come. Show women you care by making a commitment to do everything in your power to ensure that these health care goals become reality as soon as possible.

See our full agenda at nationalpartnership.org for more detailed actions policymakers can take to improve health care and economic opportunity for women across America.



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 2. Sommers, B. D., Gawande, A. A., & Baicker, K. (2017, August). Health insurance coverage and health—what the recent evidence tells us. *The New England Journal of Medicine*. Retrieved 12 September 2018, from <https://www.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/NEJMs1706645>



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