



Chronic Conditions in Women: Closing Research Gaps

National Institutes of Health (NIH) Office of Research on Women's Health (ORWH)



CHRONIC DISEASE IMPACTS AND WOMEN'S LIVES

Chronic diseases are the leading drivers of illness, disability, and death among U.S. women, yet remain understudied; about 25% of women are affected and 28% live with multiple conditions, with major impacts including 1 in 4 deaths from heart disease and higher rates of autoimmune disease, osteoporosis, depression, and certain cancers.



STRATEGIC INVESTMENTS NEEDED

Coordinated research investments are needed to address chronic conditions in women, who experience disease differently due to biological, behavioral, social, and environmental factors, and often face delayed diagnoses—creating opportunities to strengthen prevention, diagnosis, and treatment.



FEMALE-SPECIFIC CONDITIONS AND THOSE ASSOCIATED WITH SEX DIFFERENCES

- Endometriosis
- Asthma
- Cancer
- Heart disease
- Menopause
- Pain



NIH-WIDE APPROACH: ORWH-LED CHRONIC CONDITIONS PROGRAM

ORWH led a strategic NIH-wide funding initiative (RFA-OD-23-013/RFA-OD-23-014) to advance

research on chronic conditions in women through coordinated, interdisciplinary investment, for example:

- Catalyzing cross-Institute collaboration beyond disease-specific funding
- Applying a life course approach across reproductive and aging stages
- Prioritizing understudied conditions (e.g., menopause)
- Integrating and amplifying efforts across NIH into a cohesive portfolio
- Spurring innovation through new questions, methods, and partnerships
- Expanding national research capacity, including through support of early-stage investigators



MAXIMIZING SCIENTIFIC VALUE & PUBLIC HEALTH IMPACT

A coordinated approach advances understanding of chronic conditions in women and explores where biology and environment intersect, allowing the biomedical research community to:

- Generate sex-stratified data to inform clinical guidelines and treatment standards
- Investigate biological mechanisms (e.g., hormonal influences on bone and cardiovascular health) often underexplored in health studies
- Examine multimorbidity and its effects on quality of life and healthcare utilization
- Strengthen evidence for sex-informed, context-specific clinical and public health practice

In Fiscal Years 2024 and 2025

ORWH partnered with six NIH Institutes to administer and fund innovative, investigator-initiated research on chronic diseases in women, including R01 research project grants and R21 exploratory/developmental grants, for a total NIH investment of **over \$20M** on new awards to address gaps in chronic disease research affecting women.