

The Wage Gap Affects What Women Earn, The Health Gap Affects How They Live

IN MANY AREAS OF HEALTH, WOMEN ARE BEING UNDERSERVED, OVERLOOKED OR UNABLE TO ACCESS CARE AND WOMEN'S COLLEGE HOSPITAL WANTS TO TALK ABOUT IT

TORONTO, ON – April 12, 2016 – Healthcare doesn't always work the same for everyone. From research and treatment options to access to services and programs, many women are overlooked and underserved because healthcare has traditionally not considered the impact of sex and gender differences. Research shows that women's needs, including physiology, cultural challenges and life circumstances, are often not taken into consideration. This is the Health Gap. And for women in marginalized and disadvantaged communities, the gap is even wider.

"The Health Gap significantly impacts women's health and their quality of life. As a world leader in advocating for and advancing the health of women, Women's College Hospital felt it was our responsibility to raise awareness of this important issue," said Marilyn Emery, President and Chief Executive Officer, Women's College Hospital. "With many health conditions, women present differently than men and require treatment and care that recognizes the differences between genders. This is often exacerbated by various societal factors that impact many women – family responsibilities, cultural biases or stigmatization – leading to additional barriers to accessing care and creating a Health Gap which must be addressed."

Women's College Hospital (WCH) has identified several gaps in the way many women receive treatment and access healthcare. Some key examples of Health Gaps affecting women include:

- **Healthcare Research:** Women have different risk factors for certain diseases, and may also respond differently to various treatments and medications. However, until the 1990s, there was no requirement to include women in clinical trials, which means that many prescription drugs and treatment protocols still used today have been disproportionately studied on men and not designed to meet women's needs.
- **Cardiac Health:** Each year heart disease kills more women than men, but women continue to be under-represented in cardiovascular research, representing only 35 per cent of patients in heart disease research. Furthermore, research has shown that following a heart attack, women are 36 per cent less likely to enroll and participate in cardiac rehabilitation because it is not offered as

an option to many women for a variety of reasons, including societal presumptions or cultural biases. WCH researchers also found that distance and transportation issues are significant barriers to women's participation – of patients studied, 26 per cent listed these factors as specific challenges to starting cardiac rehabilitation.

- **Mental Health:** Women experience depression twice as often as men and are three times more likely than men to experience barriers to accessing mental health care. Also, the prevalence of mental health issues during the reproductive life stages (such as menstrual cycle, pregnancy, postpartum and menopause) adds to the complexity of care and treatment for women. Yet, most mental health research and therapy is based on the male experience.
- **Chronic Conditions:** Women generally live longer than men and are more likely to suffer from multiple, co-occurring chronic conditions. The number of women aged 80 and older reporting two or more chronic conditions is twice as high as the number of older men. Women are also more likely to report severe and long-lasting pain, but are typically treated less aggressively than men. Doctors approach women's pain as psychological or psychosocial and are more likely to refer women to a therapist rather than a pain clinic.
- **Social Determinants of Health:** Social determinants of health, including factors like income, employment status and housing, all influence a person's risk for disease or injury and women are even more vulnerable to these affects. Women who live in low-income, marginalized and disadvantaged communities report higher instances of hypertension, arthritis, diabetes, heart disease and substance use issues. Women in these communities also face stigmatization and significant barriers accessing health services and attending appointments because of cultural or social circumstances that make it more challenging for them to talk freely about their health conditions.

“The Health Gap is a very real threat to the well-being of women everywhere,” said Katherine Hay, President and Chief Executive Officer, Women's College Hospital Foundation. “At WCH Foundation, it is our mission to support the crucial work of Women's College Hospital as it actively identifies and closes the many gaps in healthcare affecting women and families today. Together with our growing community of 22,000 generous donors, we are providing urgently-needed funding that advances global women's health research, better care for those living with complex chronic health conditions and innovative new solutions to improve the health system as a whole. There has never been a better time for Canadians to join us in our efforts to close the Health Gap.”

WCH is working to close the Health Gap in a number of ways including groundbreaking research, innovative models of care, education and specialized programs and services. More information, including additional statistics and descriptions of the programs and research at WCH can be viewed at <http://www.womenscolleghospital.ca/media-kit>.

“Incredible, groundbreaking work is happening at Women's College Hospital every day and it's impacting not only the patients who walk through our doors, it's helping to advance the health of women across the province, the country and around the world,” said Emery. “We're reaching out to our

partners and colleagues throughout the health sector and asking them to join us in affecting change and to help us close the Health Gap for women.”

An awareness campaign led by WCH began April 11 to bring attention to the Health Gap and encourage Canadians to learn more and help spread the word about closing the #HealthGap. More information can be found at www.TheHealthGap.ca.

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Women’s College Hospital

For more than 100 years Women’s College Hospital (WCH) has been developing revolutionary advances in healthcare. Today, WCH is a world leader in the health of women and Canada’s leading, academic ambulatory hospital. A champion of equitable access, WCH advocates for the health of all women from diverse cultures and backgrounds and ensures their needs are reflected in the care they receive. It focuses on delivering innovative solutions that address Canada’s most pressing issues related to population health, patient experience and system costs.

Women’s College Hospital Foundation

Women’s College Hospital Foundation (wchf.ca) is dedicated to supporting Women’s College Hospital as it revolutionizes healthcare for women. Working together with patients, family members, staff, physicians, volunteers and community members, we raise, manage and invest funds to support the Hospital’s current and future priority needs. Over the past decade, our donor family of 22,000 generous individuals, corporate partners and foundations has provided \$115 million to change and save the lives of women and their loved ones, including \$77 million to help build the Hospital of the Future. With the completion of our building campaign, we are now turning our focus to raising unprecedented support for global leadership in women’s health research, world-leading patient care and innovative new solutions for the health system as a whole.

For more information, or to book an interview with a Women’s College Hospital representative or a doctor about the Health Gap, please contact:

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