

Government launches call for evidence to improve health and wellbeing of women in England

- To mark International Women's Day, the government is launching a 12-week call for evidence to better understand women's experiences of the health and care system
- All women are urged to share their experiences to form the basis of a new Women's Health Strategy
- The strategy will set an ambitious and positive new agenda to improve health and wellbeing and ensure health services are meeting the needs of women

Launching to coincide with International Women's Day, the call for evidence will form the basis of a landmark government-led Women's Health Strategy, to improve the health and wellbeing of women across England and place women's voices at the centre of their care.

By better understanding women's experiences, the government can ensure key parts of the health service are meeting women's needs as they should be.

Matt Hancock, Health and Social Care Secretary, said:

The healthcare system needs to work for everyone, and we must address inequalities which exist within it.

Improving women's health, especially at older ages, is critical for a fair health and care system in the future.

Our new Women's Health Strategy will be a much-needed step forward to improve the health and wellbeing of women across the country.

To build this strategy, we need to hear from those who it directly impacts. I urge all women, and those who have experiences or expertise in women's health, to come forward and share their views with us to inform the future of this important strategy.

The call for evidence has been designed to be user friendly, quick to fill in and easily accessible from people's mobiles. People who live with and care for women, organisations with experience of providing services for women and those with an expertise in women's health are also encouraged to share their views.

Nadine Dorries, Minister for Women's Health, said:

Women's experiences of health care can vary and we want to ensure

women are able to access the treatment and services they need.

It's crucial women's voices are at the front and centre of this strategy so we understand their experiences and how to improve their outcomes.

I urge every woman, and anyone who cares for women, to feed into this call for evidence and help shape the future of women's health.

The 6 core-themes included in the call for evidence are:

1. Placing women's voices at the centre of their health and care – how the health and care system engages with and listens to women at the individual level as well as at the system level.
2. Improving the quality and accessibility of information and education on women's health – women having access to high-quality information when they need to make a decision, increasing health literacy, as well as increasing awareness and understanding of women's health conditions among clinicians.
3. Ensuring the health and care system understands and is responsive to women's health and care needs across the life course – supporting women to maximise their health across their lives, and ensuring services are designed to maximise benefits for women.
4. Maximising women's health in the workplace – deepening our understanding of how women's health issues can affect their workforce participation and outcomes, both with regards to female-specific issues such as the menopause, but also conditions that are more prevalent in women such as musculoskeletal conditions, depression or anxiety
5. Ensuring that research, evidence and data support improvements in women's health – inclusion of women and women's health in research and data collection and how that information is used, and driving participation in clinical trials to support improvements in women's health.
6. Understanding and responding to the impacts of COVID-19 on women's health – supporting women through the unique challenges they've faced during the pandemic.

There is strong evidence of the need for greater focus on women's health:

- Although female life expectancy is higher than men in the UK, women on average spend less of their life in good health compared with men. Female life expectancy in this country has been improving more slowly than male life expectancy since the 1980s
- Less is known about conditions that only affect women, including common gynaecological conditions which can have severe impacts on health and wellbeing, but for which there is currently little treatment. A key example of this is endometriosis with the average time for a woman to receive a diagnosis being 7 to 8 years, and with 40% of women needing 10 or more GP appointments before being referred to a specialist

- There is also evidence that the impact of female-specific health conditions such as heavy menstrual bleeding, endometriosis, pregnancy-related issues and the menopause on women's lives is overlooked. This includes the effect they can have on women's workforce participation, productivity, and outcomes
- High-quality research and evidence is essential to delivering improvements in women's health, yet studies suggest gender biases in clinical trials and research are contributing to worse health outcomes for women. Although women make up 51% of the population, there is less evidence and data on how conditions affect women differently. A University of Leeds study showed women with a total blockage of a coronary artery were 59% more likely to be misdiagnosed than men, and found that UK women had more than double the rate of death in the 30 days following heart attack compared with men.

Minister for Equalities Kemi Badenoch said:

Women know best when it comes to their health, and every woman in this country should feel heard and respected when it comes to their health. We want women of every age, ethnicity and sexuality, from every walk of life, to respond to our call for evidence so we can develop an ambitious strategy which puts their views at the centre.

Women also face varying health issues over the course of their life. The biggest causes of death for women range from suicide in adolescence, to breast cancer in middle age, and dementia in older age – all of which lead to different interactions with the health service.

Women of all ages and backgrounds are being urged to respond to the call for evidence in order to capture the varying health issues women experience over their lives and the significant differences between women in terms of access to services, experience of services and health outcomes.

The call for evidence seeks to examine experiences of the whole health and care system, including mental health, addiction services and neurological conditions as well as issues relating specifically to women such as gynaecological conditions, menopause and pregnancy and post-natal support.

Extended quotes

Dr Edward Morris, President of the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, said:

We're delighted to see the launch of the Women's Health Strategy and welcome the opportunity this provides to improve health outcomes for women and girls from all different communities.

The introduction of a strategy focused on women's health was a key recommendation in our 'Better for Women' report and it's positive

to see the government begin to make this a reality.

For women and girls, we hope this strategy will mean their voices and experiences are listened to and go towards shaping a future health system that works for them.

This strategy has come at a crucial time as we begin the path back to a post-pandemic world.

Dr Geeta Nargund, senior NHS consultant and fertility pioneer, said:

The journey to equality in healthcare requires us to identify the gaps in provision, and so it is fantastic to see the government make this vital first step towards tackling the gender health gap. It is a move that will support the NHS and our entire healthcare system to effectively utilise their resources and deliver the best service it possibly can for women across the UK. We want to make the UK a world leader in women's health and look forward to working with the Department of Health as they strive to achieve this goal.

Mika Simmons, co-chair Ginsberg Women's Health Board, filmmaker and host of The Happy Vagina, said:

Every single woman I speak to, myself included, has experienced either misunderstanding or loss as a direct result of slow or inaccurate diagnosis of their health concerns. I am delighted that this – the gender health gap – which grew out of a severe lack of historical research into women's health issues, is not only finally being acknowledged but that steps are being taken to right size it. I hope this new government drive for thoroughly inclusive data will ensure that all women in the UK, no matter what their background or cultural demographic, will finally have their voices heard and their health needs met, at the highest possible level. We can't change the past but if we work together, I believe we can transform healthcare for women today and for future generations.

Nimco Ali OBE, CEO of The Five Foundation and co-chair of the Ginsberg Women's Health Board, said:

A healthcare that listens to women is one that works for women and girls. I welcome the Department of Health's commitment to placing women's voices at the heart of our healthcare system. This will not only save lives but it will also improve the quality of life for millions of women in this country.

Janet Lindsay, Director at women's health research charity Wellbeing of

Women, said:

We are pleased that the government has promised to place women's voices at the heart of its new Women's Health Strategy and to focus on improving care for women and girls.

We know that women make up 51% of the population, account for 47% of the workforce and that they influence the health behaviours of the rest of society. Yet women are struggling to find the information they need to ask the right questions about their health and regularly meet barriers when they attempt to book routine appointments to access basic health needs.

Importantly, the COVID-19 pandemic has further exaggerated these problems and highlighted the additional difficulties that women with disabilities or living in disadvantaged communities are facing. We need to identify solutions that will bridge these gaps and ensure both equality and equitable access to women's health services.

The research landscape is also bleak. Women's health research has not been prioritised, which means there are still important gaps in our knowledge and a lack of effective treatment options across all areas of women's health

As one of the only funders of women's health research, Wellbeing of Women believes that only by ensuring that research, evidence and data support improvements in women's health can we improve outcomes for women. When we get it right for women, everyone benefits.

Rebecca Shoosmith, Chief Executive, Jo's Cervical Cancer Trust, said:

In order to improve health outcomes among women it is vital that we listen to their experiences and make changes that address the problems they face. We welcome this new strategy and its approach, which puts the voices of women firmly at its heart. We look forward to contributing and working with DHSC to ensure the voices of our community are heard.

Dr Asha Kasliwal, President of the Faculty of Sexual and Reproductive Healthcare (FSRH), said:

The Faculty of Sexual and Reproductive Healthcare (FSRH) welcomes the call for evidence. I am pleased to see a focus on education and information as well as the aim to place women's voices at the heart of the strategy. I encourage women from all backgrounds to share their experiences of accessing reproductive healthcare.

On average, most women spend almost half of their lives either trying to plan or avoid unplanned pregnancies. This is why an integrated approach to women's health should also place contraceptive access and care in all settings at the heart of a new Women's Health Strategy. This will ensure the health and care system is responsive to women's reproductive healthcare needs across the whole life course. Crucial to achieve this will also be the integration of this strategy with the upcoming national sexual and reproductive health strategy.

There is no women's health without contraceptive care. We look forward to working with the Department of Health and Social Care to ensure that the contraceptive needs of 51% of the population are met via a comprehensive strategy.

Background information

[Download the high-resolution assets](#)

The call for evidence will run for 12 weeks from 8 March.

To amplify this, there will be 10 weeks of activity, including widespread social media with recognisable visual identity, partnerships with female-focused media outlets including interviews, roundtables with the minister and regular engagement with stakeholders.