



Overview

May, Women's Mental Health Month and Maternal Health Month, serves as a poignant reminder of the multifaceted challenges shaping women's health. Today, because of innovation, research and development, and medical breakthroughs, women have shorter diagnostic journeys and more viable treatments than ever. Despite this progress, hurdles continue in normalizing conversation on women's health in the workplace and achieving higher levels of health equity among minority populations. Lawmakers and experts are searching for solutions to align incentives, enhance access, and foster an ecosystem that improves outcomes.

This Basic provides an overview of critical domains impacting women's well-being, including **maternal health, reproductive health, menopause, oncology, and infertility** treatments such as **in vitro fertilization (IVF)**. Through an in-depth analysis of statistics, research methodologies, and legislative initiatives, the goal is to shed light on the complexities of women's health and avenues for equitable access to care across diverse communities.

Maternal Health

The United States is often cited for its poor maternal mortality rates. While it can be debated whether the country's global ranking truly reflects obstetrical factors or is rather a product of the way the United States counts maternal deaths, the U.S. currently ranks as one of the most challenged industrialized countries in the world for maternal health. Despite advancements in healthcare, **barriers to treatment** persist, disproportionately affecting women of color, particularly in southern and rural areas. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reveals a stark reality: the United States grapples with a maternal mortality rate of 18.6 deaths per 100,000 births. Of profound concern is the finding that Black patients face a mortality rate 3.5 times higher than their white counterparts, underscoring racial inequities in this part of the healthcare system.

One of the most challenging subsets contributing to poor maternal health is **postpartum depression** — a condition affecting approximately 1 in 7 mothers. The symptoms include depression, insomnia, fatigue, anxiety, and loss of energy, among others. **Risk factors** for the condition include a history of depression, a risky pregnancy, the mother's age, and chronic conditions. Barriers to treatment can include low awareness, mental health stigma, and a small window of assessment, diagnosis, and treatment compared to other conditions.

In 2024, President Biden signed critical maternal health priorities into law as

Center Forward Basics

Center Forward brings together members of Congress, not-for-profits, academic experts, trade associations, corporations and unions to find common ground. Our mission: to give centrist allies the information they need to craft common sense solutions, and provide those allies the support they need to turn those ideas into results.

In order to meet our challenges we need to put aside the partisan bickering that has gridlocked Washington and come together to find common sense solutions.

For more information, please visit www.center-forward.org

Key Definitions:

- **Maternal Health:** Refers to the health of a woman during pregnancy, childbirth, and the postnatal period
- **Menopause:** A life stage, typically in a woman's late 40s or 50s, defined once 12 months have passed after the last menstrual cycle
- **Oncology:** The study and treatment of tumors
- **Infertility:** The inability to achieve a successful pregnancy based on a patient's medical, sexual, reproductive history, age, physical findings, diagnostic testing, or any combination of those factors

part of the bipartisan Consolidated Appropriations Act and Further Consolidated Appropriations Act for Fiscal Year 2024. These Acts secured more than \$100 million in funding for the National Institute of Health to implement maternal health initiatives, grants for minority-serving institutions to study maternal health disparities, funding for community-based organizations supporting moms in geographic areas with high rates of adverse maternal health outcomes, state grants for maternal health innovation, funding a maternal health hotline, implementation of midwife education and training, and more. In 2025, the federal government continued its commitment to maternal health by enacting a full-year continuing resolution. This resolution maintained funding for key maternal health programs at the prior year's levels.

Infertility/IVF

Infertility represents a significant health challenge affecting millions of people worldwide. Infertility is a medical condition recognized by the American Medical Association and the World Health Organization (WHO), and defined as the inability to achieve a successful pregnancy based on a patient's medical, sexual, reproductive history, age, physical findings, diagnostic testing, or any combination of those factors. According to the WHO, infertility affects 1 in 6 people globally. Assisted reproductive technologies (ART), such as in-vitro fertilization (IVF), offer hope to many, with approximately 100,000 babies born through IVF each year in the United States. IVF enables individuals who use fertility preservation services to save their eggs, sperm, or reproductive tissues to have children at a later time. However, access to infertility diagnosis and treatments, including IVF, remains limited. Only 47% of large employers offer coverage for IVF treatment.

Without preeminent federal legislation, the ability to access diagnosis and treatment is left to the states, which can vary greatly. Twenty-two states and the District of Columbia have passed fertility insurance coverage, and eighteen cover fertility preservation for iatrogenic (medically induced) infertility. Fifteen of those have included IVF coverage as well.

Oncology

Breast and cervical cancers pose formidable challenges to women's health, with disparities in screening rates exacerbating existing obstacles. In 2025, over 316,950 women will be diagnosed with invasive breast cancer, and 13,360 will be diagnosed with cervical cancer. Concerted efforts are needed to bridge the gap in awareness and access surrounding breast and cervical cancer screenings.

Lower cancer screening rates persist among uninsured and underinsured populations. To combat low screening levels, the CDC's National Breast and Cervical Cancer Early Detection Program (NBCCEDP) was created to address these disparities by offering critical screenings, diagnostic tests, and treatment referrals to limited-income, underserved, underinsured, and uninsured communities. The program has provided more than 15 million exams to more than 6 million eligible people. To qualify for the NBCCEDP program, patients

- **In Vitro Fertilization:** A procedure in which a woman's eggs are removed from a woman's ovary and combined with sperm outside the body to form embryos
- **Barriers to Treatment:** Events or characteristics of the individual or system that restrain or serve as obstacles to a person receiving healthcare. Examples can include location, language, stigma, etc.
- **Postpartum Depression:** A health condition occurring after childbirth. The symptoms include depression, insomnia, fatigue, anxiety, etc.
- **Risk Factors:** A component increasing the chance of developing the disease. Some example risk factors of cancer are age, family history, smoking, infection with certain viruses/bacteria, radiation, etc.
- **Perimenopause:** The transitional time when the body experiences a decline in reproductive hormones, resulting in the end of a woman's menstrual cycles
- **Hormone Therapy:** A medical treatment for menopausal symptoms involving replacing hormones that the body's ovaries are no longer producing

Key Statistics:

- The average age of menopause is 51 in industrialized countries
- Only 33.3% of women say they are aware of the menopause-related benefits they are offered
- Only 14% of employees say their employees recognize the need for menopause-related benefits
- 80% of OB-GYN residents admitted to being ill-prepared to discuss menopause
- Women's health receives less than 1% of the venture capital investment in biopharma
- Twice as many women have

must be at or below 250% of the federal poverty level and between the ages of 21-64 for cervical cancer screenings and 40-64 for breast cancer screenings.

Legislative efforts are on their way, such as the bipartisan Screening for Communities to Receive Early and Equitable Needed Services (SCREENS) for Cancer Act, introduced by Representatives Joe Morelle (D-NY) and Brian Fitzpatrick (R-PA) in the House, and by Senators Tammy Baldwin (D-WI) and Susan Collins (R-ME) in the Senate. This legislation aims to reauthorize the NBCCEDP through 2030, ensuring continued access to vital breast and cervical cancer screenings for low-income and underinsured individuals. The bill proposes enhancements to the program, including improved outreach, patient navigation, and follow-up care.

Menopause

Menopause is a natural biological transition marking the cessation of menstrual cycles affecting an estimated 75 million women in the United States. Menopausal transition has three phases: (1) **perimenopause**: the time when the body experiences a natural decline in reproductive hormones resulting in the end of a woman's menstrual cycle; (2) Menopause: the point when a woman has gone twelve months without a period. Most women experience this between 40 and 58; and (3) Postmenopause: The time of life after menopause.

Symptoms of menopause can include, but are not limited to, inconsistent menstrual cycles, hot flashes, trouble sleeping, joint pain, decreased focus, decreased mental health, and more. Some symptoms, such as hot flashes, can continue to occur for an average of 8.8 years. Despite its profound impact on women's health and quality of life, societal perceptions often fail to afford menopause the same significance as pregnancy or parental leave. This oversight is reflected, in part, by the economic toll of menopause-related symptoms, with the US economy hemorrhaging an estimated \$26.6 billion annually due to productivity losses and healthcare expenditures.

Women navigating menopause encounter myriad challenges in the workplace. Twenty percent of the workforce are in some phase of the menopause transition, fifty percent of whom have reported symptoms having a negative impact on their work life, and twenty-five percent considered not pursuing, or did not pursue, leadership positions because of symptoms. The workplace culture around discussing menopause is largely unwelcoming. More than half of women say they feel uncomfortable talking about menopause at work. This lack of communication is clear between the employer and the employee. Seventy-six percent of HR benefit managers reported talking about menopause-related issues with employees, whereas only three percent of female employees reported discussing those same topics with their HR benefit managers. When polled, female employees feel there should be greater awareness, education, and employer benefits related to menopause. Eighty-one percent say there is a need for better education on menopause before, during, and after its onset. Another sixty percent believe menopause is generally stigmatized. Accessing menopause professionals can be challenging given the lack of provider education. The workplace benefits female employees have reported valuing are a written menopause policy, **hormone replacement therapy**, nonhormonal treatment options covered by health insurance, and access to menopause professionals.

Looking Ahead

In conclusion, women's health is shaped by an individual's social, economic, and cultural circumstances. By acknowledging and addressing disparities, lawmakers, healthcare providers, employers, and communities can foster a future where every woman has equitable access to care and support.

- Alzheimer's compared to men
- IVF accounts for over 99% of assisted reproductive technology (ART) procedures
- The average IVF cycle costs between \$15,000 and \$30,000
- The average number of IVF cycles to become pregnant is 2.5
- Between 2012 and 2021, IVF use has more than doubled
- Women 45 and older accounted for over 30% of live births through IVF
- California, New York, and Texas are the states with the most IVF births
- Statistics indicate that around 22-25% of women will experience domestic violence at some point in their lives

Links to Other Resources

- Alzheimer's Society: [Why is Dementia Different for Women?](#)
- American Addiction Centers: [Barriers to Addiction Treatment](#)
- American Cancer Society: [Cancer Facts and Figures 2024](#)
- American Cancer Society: [Cancer Prevention and Early Detection Facts and Figures](#)
- American Journal of Obstetrics and Gynecology: [Maternal Mortality in the U.S. - How It Is Counted](#)
- BIO News: [Bio's Women's Health Task Force](#)
- Black Maternal Health Caucus: [Maternal Health Priorities Included in FY24 Bipartisan Appropriations Law](#)
- Cancer Causes and Control: [The eligibility and reach of the national breast and cervical cancer early detection program after implementation of the Affordable Care Act](#)
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: [Assisted Reproductive Therapy](#)
- Congressional Research Service: [Poverty Among the Population Aged 65 and Older](#)
- Contemporary OB-GYN: [Menopause Curriculum Lacking in Residency Programs](#)
- Department of Education: [The effects of menopause transition on women's economic participation](#)
- Department of Health and Human Services: [In Vitro Fertilization Fact Sheet](#)
- GoodRx: [Helping Women Thrive Through Life Challenges](#)
- GoodRx: [Navigate Fertility with Confidence](#)
- GoodRx: [Prioritize Your Menopausal Health](#)
- IZA: [Hormone Replacement Therapy and Labor Market Behavior of Middle-Aged Women](#)
- Ipsos: [Many women report not feeling comfortable discussing menopause at work](#)
- Let's Talk Menopause: [Further Reading](#)
- Maternal Mental Health Leadership Alliance: [Fact Sheet Library](#)
- Mayo Clinic: [The Price Tag on Menopause](#)
- Mercer: [Family-friendly benefits take off](#)
- National Infertility Association: [Insurance Coverage by State](#)
- National Institute of Cancer: [Definition of In Vitro Fertilization](#)
- National Institute of Cancer: [Definition of Risk Factor](#)
- National Institute of Mental Health: [Perinatal Depression](#)
- National Institute of Health: [National Library of Medicine](#)
- National Library of Medicine: [Postpartum Depression Screening Needs More Consistency](#)
- Society for Women's Health Research: [Menopause Workplace Resource Guide for Women](#)
- Society for Women's Health Research: [EMPACT Menopause Study Bulletin](#)
- U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics: [Women in the labor force](#)
- World Health Organization: [Maternal Health](#)