

66th Session of the WHO Regional Committee for Europe

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WHF Statement on Agenda Item 5(h): Strategy on women's health and well-being in the WHO European Region

Honourable Chair, distinguished delegates,

The World Heart Federation welcomes the Committee's report, and commends the draft strategy's vision to enable, support and empower all girls and women to achieve their full health potential and well-being.

We further commend the report's acknowledgement of the false perception of cardiovascular disease (or 'CVD') as a men's health issue: CVD remains the number one killer of women worldwide, claiming more than 8.6 million women every year: a third of all female deaths.¹ It is the major cause of death for women across the European Region.²

In terms of heart health, gender equality is still a distant reality, with the outcomes of CVD often worse in women than in men: 42% of women who have a heart attack die within one year, compared with 24% of men.³ Similarly, after a first stroke, women are kept in hospitals longer, and experience greater morbidity than men receiving similar care.⁴

Despite these statistics, women with heart disease are more likely to be under-diagnosed and under-treated. This imbalance occurs partly because the presentation, progression and outcomes of CVD are different in women than in men. It is also due to male-orientated research having a limited understanding of heart disease in women.

As the primary cause of death and disability in women in the European Region, CVD must be made a priority in the new strategy. To support prevention and control efforts, the World Heart Federation offers four recommendations:

1. **Prioritise the inclusion of women in clinical trials** to strengthen analysis of gender differences.
2. **Ensure that clinicians, researchers and patients** can access sex-specific data, and that health workers are trained to provide sex-specific care.
3. **Provide CVD screening and lifestyle counselling** to low-income and post-menopausal women, recognizing their greater risk of CVD.
4. **Improve reporting of health care data** by gender, race, ethnicity and income.

WHF reaffirms its commitment to support EURO Member States in their implementation of the strategy on women's health and well-being in the European Region.

¹ http://www.world-heart-federation.org/fileadmin/user_upload/Congress/WCC2012/Documents/WCC_2012_Dubai_Women_and_CVD_Press_Conference_18042012.pdf

² http://www.euro.who.int/_data/assets/pdf_file/0020/314534/66wd14e_WomensHealthStrategy_160519.pdf?ua=1

³ http://www.world-heart-federation.org/fileadmin/user_upload/Congress/WCC2012/Documents/WCC_2012_Dubai_Women_and_CVD_Press_Conference_18042012.pdf

⁴ Ibid.