

RIGHT FROM THE START: PROMOTING A LIFE-COURSE APPROACH TO GENDER EQUITY IN HEALTH



European Institute of Women's Health 21st Anniversary Expert Conference

4-5 December 2017, Brussels, Belgium

European Institute of Women's Health Policy Brief Anthology

Introduction

One of the biggest challenges facing European societies is the current demographic change and retaining health across the lifespan in an increasingly ageing population. Approximately 70% to 80% of health care budgets across the EU are spent on treating chronic diseases. Health promotion and primary prevention is a way to reduce the burden of chronic diseases.

Large differences between women and men exist across various health conditions. Some are primarily determined by biological variation. Others are the result of the manner in which societies socialise women and men and the power relations between them. Many health disparities reflect a combination of both the biological differences and social factors. Understanding this interaction is important for addressing sex and gender inequities in prevention, diagnosis, treatment and care, ultimately, for improving health in both women and men.

Over the years, scientific knowledge has increasingly demonstrated that some treatments affect men and women differently. However, the proportion of treatments for which men and women respond differently is yet unknown.

The EIWH policy briefs highlight the sex and gender differences that exist across various health conditions such as lung cancer, asthma, diabetes, other chronic diseases and lifestyle issues, such as smoking and alcohol. For example research on cardiovascular disease (CVD), osteoporosis and depression has identified significant differences among women and men with respect to the distribution of these diseases. Women and men have different sex and gender-related risks for developing certain conditions and respond differently to treatment. Biological differences between males and females can affect how a medicine works in the body. Additionally, patterns of gene expression differ between males and females.

The policy briefs are reviewed by experts in the field and also by a patient representative when possible. All policy briefs include a "Steps for Policy Action" section, which makes concrete recommendations for policy to promote the prevention of chronic diseases and improve treatment and care. Convincing our governments and reorienting our health and social systems to invest early on in prevention, is today's major societal challenge.

The policy briefs are available on the EIWH website and distributed widely to policymakers, politicians and stakeholders interested in sex and gender equity in health.