

Women's Health Parliamentary Interest Group launch event

*23 October 2023, 10-11am CET
European Parliament (5E1) and online*

On Monday, 23 October, the **European Institute of Women's Health (EIWH)** launched the Women's Health Interest Group at the European Parliament. The aim of the group, consisting of several Members of the European Parliament (Stelios Kypouropoulos, Maria da Graça Carvalho, Billy Kelleher, Maria Walsh, Sirpa Pietikäinen and Frances Fitzgerald) is for the European Union (EU) to commit to the reduction of health inequalities and provide equitable health for all women, through the provision of an **EU Strategy for Women's Health**.

MEP Deirdre Clune (EPP, IE): "Women are more exposed to the emerging crisis of antimicrobial resistance (AMR) as they experience childbirth, breastfeeding and menstruation."

Peggy Maguire, Director General of the European Institute of Women's Health reflected on how women's health has not been given sufficient research, attention or prioritisation, nor received adequate funding and resources. Of particular concern is the underrepresentation of women in clinical trials, and the lack of gender and sex aggregated data. **EIWH senior researcher Rebecca Moore** gave an overview of EIWH's research into maternal health, caring, and older women's health as well as ongoing mapping of best practices in countries across the EU.



MEP Stelios Kypouropoulos (EPP, EL): "Women's health is not a women's issue but a societal one."

On national best practices, **Dilly O'Brien, Women's Health lead, Department of Health** in Ireland shared how a Women's Health Taskforce used extensive community outreach and dedicated funding to understand gaps in women's health needs and deliver initiatives such as a free contraceptive scheme for women up to 30, the implementation of a national maternity strategy and the launch of the first Irish funding opportunity for in-vitro fertilisation treatment. **Sylvia Gaiswinkler, Senior Health expert, Austrian National Public Health Institute** shared insights into the action plan for women's health, including the Annual Women's Health Dialogue which aims to develop women-specific indicators across many policy areas and integrate women's health experts into decision-making bodies.

The host, MEP Tilly Metz (Greens/EFA, LU) stressed the importance of a holistic approach to improving women's health that encompasses different sectors. She emphasised how raising awareness of women's health needs could start with the training of healthcare professionals, magnifying the voices of experts, or looking at work-life balance. Additionally, she underscored the importance of having both men and women advocate for women's health, noticing how encouraging it is to observe such representation among the members of the Interest Group. MEP Metz concluded her speech by signaling how *'this group marks just the initial phase, as post-EU elections, the importance of the Interest Group will be more critical than ever.'*



Co-host MEP Sirpa Pietikäinen (EPP, FI) called for increased awareness, a deeper understanding, and a comprehensive exploration of the concept of women's health. Sex differences are apparent since the early stages of life, and it is evident that health requirements vary between genders. However, it is notable that a considerable proportion of pharmaceuticals administered to women undergo testing predominantly on young, Caucasian males. Additionally, women's symptoms of various diseases differ, often resulting in under-diagnosis and inadequate treatment. Therefore, it is imperative to place this issue on the agenda of both the EU and Member States. As a first step, MEP Pietikäinen stressed the necessity of encouraging the current European Commission to establish a comprehensive strategy or roadmap for women's health. This plan should encompass research, medical training for physicians and nurses, and financial support dedicated to raising awareness and improving the health of women.

