

02-03

## STATEMENT OF POLICY

### Women's Health

#### Policy

The National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO) supports:

- Efforts that address social determinants of health to improve women's health through research, education, and access to quality healthcare and
- A life course perspective on women's health.

#### Justification

Women's health status is directly influenced by a number of social and environmental factors. Unequal access to information and health services further increase health risks among women. Some of the sociocultural factors that prevent women and girls from benefiting from quality health services and attaining optimal health include unequal power relationships between men and women; social norms that decrease education and paid employment opportunities; an exclusive focus on women's reproductive roles; and potential or actual experience of physical, sexual, and emotional violence.<sup>1</sup> These factors impact availability of and access to quality healthcare and preventive services. A growing number of women in this country lack health insurance and access to health and social services. Nationwide, approximately 18 percent of women (over 17 million) are uninsured.<sup>2</sup> Ultimately, these factors contribute to poor health outcomes.

Research and education through a life course perspective leads to improved understanding of risk factors and enhanced opportunities for prevention. The life course perspective suggests that a complex interplay of biological, behavioral, psychological, and social protective and risk factors contributes to health outcomes across the span of a person's life. A life course approach to women's health focuses on preventive care by examining a woman's physical and mental health across her entire lifespan rather than simply focusing on reproductive health. With a focus on preventive care and education throughout a woman's life, women are empowered to influence their health and are self-aware of health status and behaviors. Under this approach, healthcare and preventive services for women are comprehensive and integrated across the lifespan. The well-being of women affects the well-being of children. A life course approach recognizes the intergenerational aspects of health and places increased value on ensuring the health of all women.

Being a man or a woman has significant impact on health status. Certain diseases and conditions exclusively or disproportionately impact women's health. In addition, there are substantial differences between the sexes in leading causes of death, risk factors, signs and symptoms of disease, and prevention or treatment strategies. Some of the diseases or conditions that disproportionately affect women include, but are not limited to, heart disease, physical disabilities, depression, and certain cancers. Additionally, minority women are



disproportionately affected by a number of diseases and health conditions, including HIV/AIDS, other sexually transmitted infections, diabetes, and overweight and obesity.<sup>3</sup>

More research is needed to address resources gaps, reduce disparities, and improve knowledge to prevent the negative sociocultural conditions that impact women's health. Prevention research, especially as it relates to the etiology of women's health issues, and with a particular focus on gender inequalities as well as racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic disparities in health outcomes, is a critical component of the women's health research agenda. Additionally, it is important to ensure that women enroll in clinical trials to better understand the causes, symptoms, prevention, and treatment of conditions and diseases that specifically affect women. Additional research will support the life course perspective as a framework for examining women's health. As more evidence on the impact of gender on health becomes available, local health departments will be better equipped to develop appropriate responses to promote and expand health policy and health preventive services to ensure optimal health for all women.

### **Record of Action**

*Proposed by Community Health and Prevention Committee*

*Adopted by NACCHO Board of Directors*

*February 28, 2002*

*Updated August 26, 2005*

*Updated July 29, 2009*

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<sup>1</sup> World Health Organization. Women's Health. Retrieved on March 24, 2009 from [http://www.who.int/topics/womens\\_health/en/](http://www.who.int/topics/womens_health/en/).

<sup>2</sup> The Henry J. Kaiser Foundation (2007). Women's Health Policy Fact Sheet. Women's Health Insurance Coverage. Retrieved on October 31, 2008 from [http://www.kff.org/womenshealth/upload/6000\\_06.pdf](http://www.kff.org/womenshealth/upload/6000_06.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Health Resources and Services Administration. (2007). Women's Health USA, 2007. Retrieved on June 25, 2009 from [http://www.mchb.hrsa.gov/whusa\\_07/index.htm](http://www.mchb.hrsa.gov/whusa_07/index.htm).