

Women's voices to be at the heart of renewed health strategy

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Women across the country will be better heard and served under new plans set out in the renewed Women's Health Strategy.

- Women to be empowered with a stronger say in their care in new trial, where they will be asked if, based on their experience, money should be withheld from providers and used for targeted improvements
- Gynae care streamlined to cut waiting lists and ensure faster access for conditions like endometriosis and fibroids
- New reforms to tackle outdated and misogynistic practices around pain relief

Women across the country will be better heard and served under new plans set out in the renewed Women's Health Strategy, published today (Wednesday 15 April).

Women's experiences will be put at the centre of care across the healthcare system, ensuring patient's voices are listened to and acted upon, including exploring ways in which women's feedback can be directly linked to provider funding and targeted improvements through a new trial. The move aims to ensure services are held accountable for listening to women, in a bid to stamp out long-standing issues with women being ignored.

Women will be directed to the right professional first time through a single referral point, along with marrying local services with online support to drastically cut waiting lists and ensure women no longer face years-long waits for diagnosis and treatment for conditions like endometriosis, which can take nearly a decade to diagnose.

A new standard of care will also be produced to ensure women are finally offered appropriate and effective pain relief for invasive gynaecological procedures, from contraceptive fitting through to hysteroscopies, addressing long-standing concerns around inadequate pain management.

Health and Social Care Secretary, Wes Streeting, said:

We inherited a broken NHS, which was particularly felt by women, who have for so long been let down by a healthcare system that too often gaslights women, treating their pain as an inconvenience and their symptoms as an overreaction.

Whether it's being passed from one appointment to another for conditions like endometriosis and fibroids, or a lack of proper pain relief during invasive procedures, through to having to navigate symptoms for years before receiving a diagnosis, it's clear the system is failing women.

Women's voices must be central to delivering effective, respectful and empathetic care. We need to hit medical misogyny where it hurts - the wallet. Today's renewed strategy will tackle the issues women face everyday and ensure no woman is left fighting to be heard.

Dr Sue Mann, NHS England's clinical director for women's health, said:

We have come a long way in the last decade with women's health being talked about more but there are still parts of society and the health system that are trapped in outdated thinking.

Too many women are still dismissed for serious symptoms that impact on every part of their lives, whether that's menstrual pain, irregular periods, or hot flushes and brain fog that affect many women experiencing the menopause.

The renewed women's health strategy will build significantly on the work the NHS has been doing to ensure women are heard and get the specialist care they need – with a focus on bringing down waiting times, delivering more care in communities, and giving women more choice over their care.

Professor Lucy Chappell, Chief Scientific Adviser at the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) and Chief Executive Officer of the NIHR said:

The renewal of the Women's Health Strategy marks another important opportunity in our mission to build a fairer health system. At the NIHR, we seek to influence the culture of research to ensure women's voices shape innovation and the development of new treatments and care.

By tackling long-standing disparities, addressing gaps in the evidence base through gender balanced research guidelines, and making it easier for women to take part in clinical trials, we are ensuring that the research that we fund benefits all women in society.

Dr Alison Wright, President of the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists said:

The refreshed Women's Health Strategy marks an important renewal of the government's commitment to delivering an NHS that works for women.

We welcome the inclusion of many priorities the RCOG has long been calling for, including tackling the gynaecology waiting list crisis, raising menstrual health awareness, and supporting sustainable abortion services.

With over 565,000 women still waiting for gynaecological care, there is a clear opportunity to embed Women's Health Hubs within the neighbourhood health model.

For the Strategy to achieve its full potential, it is vital that it is backed by sustained investment, clear delivery plans, and transparent progress reporting. We stand ready to work together with Government to ensure this Strategy a success.

Under this government, gynaecology waiting lists have already fallen by over 30,000 since June 2024, bolstered by record spending in the NHS and wider plans to tackle waiting lists through the 10 Year Health Plan.

Women's health has also been prioritised through the announcement of NHS Online – which will support women with menstrual and menopausal symptoms, along with bringing care into the community through new and expanded community diagnostic centres, offering services including blood tests and MRIs to dramatically cut waits between gynae appointments.

This ambitious strategy renewal is made possible by the record £26 billion in funding for the NHS, secured by the UK's first female Chancellor.

Other reforms set out in the renewed strategy include:

- Redesigning clinical pathways for heavy periods, urogynaecology and menopause to speed up diagnosis and treatment
- Funding a specialist centre in each region to introduce group-based approaches to care, helping women understand and manage their conditions better
- Launching a new £1 million programme to improve menstrual education so girls are better equipped to recognise the signs and symptoms of unhealthy periods
- Launching a £1.5 million Femtech challenge fund to accelerate adoption of innovations that could transform women's healthcare in the future
- Establishing the women's voices partnership to bring organisations representing women together to help inform future policy and decision making
- Provide better access to contraceptive and abortion care with continued support for protected spaces
- Review how different levels of support should work for families who experience repeated baby loss, and update the guidance based on that.

Through the National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR), the government is funding research into areas of unmet need for women's health - including to improve care for young women living with intense period pain, and first of its kind technology to treat threatened miscarriage. NIHR are also embedding new sex and gender policies into health research, so that findings are genuinely representative and no woman is left behind by science.

Janet Lindsay, Chief Executive at Wellbeing of Women, said:

Wellbeing of Women welcomes the launch of the refreshed Women's Health Strategy. We fully support the emphasis on listening to women's voices when planning individual care, and in designing wider systems for diagnosis, treatment, and support.

We are pleased to see menstrual health placed at the centre of the strategy and welcome the government's commitment to strengthening education in schools. As part of our Just a Period campaign, we look forward to supporting this work, developing RSHE resources, and expanding our Period Symptom Checker so that everyone can feel informed and empowered about their health.

Real progress in women's health is only possible through true collaboration between grassroot organisations, charities, healthcare professionals, industry, and government. Wellbeing of Women are committed to that collaboration and will continue to work across the sector to ensure the refreshed strategy drives meaningful, long-term improvements for all women and girls across the country."

Emma Cox, Chief Executive Endometriosis UK said:

Today's renewed Women's Health Strategy comes at a time when it is desperately needed. Diagnosis times for endometriosis are going up not down and it's now taking an average of 9 years 4 months - rising to 11 years for diverse ethnic communities - which is totally unacceptable. Leadership and decisive actions will be vital to drive these times down.

Endometriosis UK welcomes the commitments in the renewed Women's Health Strategy which we have long been calling for, including streamlining gynaecology care and cutting waiting lists to ensure faster access for conditions like endometriosis, improving menstrual health education in schools, and ensuring women's voices are involved in future policy making.

A focus on symptoms such as heavy menstrual bleeding and pelvic pain has the potential to speed up diagnosis of endometriosis, adenomyosis and menstrual health conditions. Providing much needed pathways to access diagnosis and treatment, and ensuring healthcare practitioners recognise and take these symptoms seriously, could result in a step change in speed of diagnosis and access to care.

These commitments must be matched with a clear roadmap for delivery, including ensuring the necessary resources and capacity. We now look forward to working with the Government to ensure these commitments become reality so that everyone with endometriosis, adenomyosis and menstrual health conditions have their symptoms recognised and believed, and can access the right care at the right time.

Dr Charmaine Griffiths, Chief Executive of the British Heart Foundation, said:

This is an important step towards making sure every woman is listened to and receives the care she needs. Being heard and understood are critical to ensuring women get the right treatment at the right time. Now we need sustained action right across the NHS to ensure women's voices are both listened to - and acted upon - to protect women's heart health at every stage of life.

The outdated idea that heart disease is a 'man's disease' has cost many women their health and, in some cases, their lives. Their symptoms are too often overlooked, and women continue to be underrepresented in crucial heart research. That's why BHF is committed to changing a poor status quo by investing in cutting-edge research into women's heart health and taking bold steps to strengthen the science that underpins better care for millions of women.

Dr Zara Haider, President of the College of Sexual & Reproductive Healthcare, said:

For far too long, women's health needs have been placed at the bottom of the list, so it's good to see this Government is finally working to address this. We're really pleased to see women's sexual and reproductive health placed firmly at the centre of this renewed strategy, with plans to expand access to the most effective forms of contraception. We are also encouraged to see that the Government has listened to our recent campaign about pain during coil fittings and is working to address this.

Making services accessible and recognising the needs of patients is another welcome

addition. If Neighbourhood Health Centres, which aim to offer a single, convenient point of access for women's health, can replicate the success demonstrated by Women's Health Hubs, this would be a major step forward.

Professor Faye Ruddock DL, Founding Chair, Caribbean & African Health Network (CAHN) said:

The Caribbean & African Health Network (CAHN) warmly welcomes the renewed Women's Health Strategy and is encouraged by its clear commitment to tackling the deep-rooted inequalities that continue to affect women's health, particularly for Black women and other marginalised groups.

The recognition of key women's health concerns such as fibroids, menstrual health, and menopause inequalities, alongside the focus on community voice, co-production, and culturally responsive care, reflects meaningful listening and genuine intent.

We look forward to working closely with DHSC, NHS England, ICBs, and key stakeholders to ensure that implementation is grounded in the lived experiences of the women most affected.

This work builds on the government's action to reform women's health, including free emergency contraception in pharmacies, at-home HPV testing kits, gynaecology as the first specialty for NHS online and the introduction of bereavement leave for miscarriage.

From this year, the standard NHS Health Check offered to all adults aged 40 to 74 will also include a question about menopause symptoms, giving up to 5 million women an easier route to advice and support.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/womens-voices-to-be-at-the-heart-of-renewed-health-strategy>