MARCH

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

EQUAL RIGHTS, EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES AND EQUAL POWER. THIS IS THE ETHOS BEHIND INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY (IWD) – a global movement and call to action recognized annually on March 8. The IWD movement strives to create a gender-equal world – one that is free of bias, discrimination and violence. International Women's Day is marked by celebrations highlighting the achievements of women as well as demonstrations that urge governments to guarantee equal pay, equal access to healthcare and education, and justice for victims of gender-based violence.[1]

Does IWD still matter in 2026?

While Canada has made significant progress in moving toward gender equality, there is still work to be done. The endemic issue of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls and 2SLGBTQIA+ people (MMIWG) is a long-standing national tragedy that is sustained by institutional failure and apathy. Canada also has one of the largest women's health gaps in the world, placing fifth worst globally.[2] Locally and globally, poverty, hunger, war, climate disasters and backlash against feminism are eroding progress and threatening to destroy the gains made over recent generations.[3]

Did you know?

1. Despite making up only 4% of Canada's female population, Indigenous women make up 16% of all female homicide victims and are three times as likely to be sexually assaulted than non-Indigenous women in Canada.[4]
2. Women experiencing chest pain wait 11 minutes longer on average for care in the emergency department than men with the same symptoms.[5]
3. 90% of individuals in the U.S. with lupus are women; lupus is two to three times more prevalent in racial and ethnic minority populations than in white populations.[6]
4. Workplace safety standards are often designed for male workers, leaving female workers exposed to risk through poorly fitting PPE and lifting standards that do not consider musculoskeletal differences.[7]
5. Regular exposure to cleaning sprays over time has been shown to have similarly deleterious effects on lung health as smoking a pack of cigarettes per day. As housework is still a heavily gendered role, this has a disproportionate impact on women, who are responsible for the lion's share of cleaning at home and outside of the home in paid cleaning roles.[8]

Connection to Doctors Nova Scotia's work

Physicians in Nova Scotia have a vital role to play in achieving gender health-equity. In a world that defaults to male, reversing health outcome disparities requires applying a women's health lens to existing mental models and approaches to service delivery. Physicians must continue to prioritize holistic care, collaborating with patients to tailor care plans to their unique needs and environments.

The Society for Women's Health Research 2021 Women's Health Equity Initiative[9] outlines goals for advancing women's health. These include:

- enhancing education and awareness concerning disparities in women's health that persist across the lifespan
- prioritizing intersectional research solutions that address disparities in diagnosis and treatment
- improving access to quality healthcare for all women, with an intersectional lens on those subpopulations who experience the greatest challenges
- enhanced measurement and evaluation of progress in addressing women's health issues

References

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