

**NATIONAL HEART, LUNG, AND BLOOD INSTITUTE**

**WOMEN'S HEART HEALTH:**

**DEVELOPING A NATIONAL HEALTH EDUCATION ACTION PLAN**

**OVERVIEW OF SELECTED WOMEN'S HEART HEALTH  
EDUCATION PROGRAMS IN THE UNITED STATES**

**March 26 – 27, 2001**

## Introduction

The National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (NHLBI) is committed to improving women's cardiovascular health and is conducting a strategy development workshop as the first step in developing a science-based national action plan for a comprehensive health education effort for patients, health professionals, and the public.

As part of the preparation for the Workshop in March 2001, NHLBI conducted a search of cardiovascular health education programs in the United States targeted to women. The search focused on national-level and community-based education programs as well as Internet-based heart health information for women. The Institute believes it is important to ensure that program efforts are not duplicated as well as to consider possible partners and stakeholders for implementing the national action plan. Therefore, we are asking workshop participants to take the results of this program search into account during their group sessions on developing the national action plan.

## Results of the Search

The search found many different programs and sources of information on CVD targeted to women. They include Internet-only health information sites, national initiatives, and community-based programs throughout the country. Sponsors of women's heart health education programs include Federal agencies, businesses, health care facilities, women's organizations, and organizations of health professionals. Following is a brief discussion of some of the various types of activities and initiatives found by the search.

### Cardiovascular Disease Information Targeted to Women Through the Internet

The Internet has become an important channel for disseminating health information to the 62 million users accessing it. Health-related sites exist in astounding numbers on the Internet. These range from consumer-oriented sites like WebMD ([www.webmd.com](http://www.webmd.com)) to medically oriented sites like that of the American Academy of Family Physicians ([www.aafp.org](http://www.aafp.org)). According to the U.S. Statistical Abstract, 46 percent of Internet users in a 30-day period are women, and many sites are targeted to them.<sup>1</sup>

We conducted our initial search by using Google, an Internet search engine, with the term "women and cardiovascular disease." The search engine returned thousands of hits, and we selected 75 for further examination. Sponsors of these sites include federal agencies, professional organizations, universities, women's health and clinical services, and women's health organizations. Our review revealed the following:

- Twenty-seven (36 percent) of the sites have no cardiovascular health content targeted to women, though some contain general information on CVD or risk factors.
- Of the 19 health professional organization sites reviewed, 9 (47 percent) contain no information on cardiovascular disease in women.

We also conducted a second, more specific Internet search using several major search engines and different combinations of search terms related to women and cardiovascular disease. This search also resulted in thousands of hits; however, further investigation showed only several

hundred that were relevant to this report. We examined 20 of these sites, and highlights of the results include the following:

- Few sites are dedicated solely to CVD in women. The majority of dedicated sites were clinical care facilities, such as The Women’s Heart Center in Atlanta, Georgia ([www.womensheartcenter.com](http://www.womensheartcenter.com)) and the Women’s Heart Institute in Southern California ([www.womensheartinstitute.com](http://www.womensheartinstitute.com)). Both of these sites include CVD prevention activities.
- One national coalition is dedicated to heart disease in women. WomenHeart: The National Coalition for Women with Heart Disease ([www.womenheart.org](http://www.womenheart.org)) was founded by heart attack survivors and provides heart health information, interaction, advocacy, and support.
- The most common CVD topics addressed on the sites are heart attack warning signs, high blood pressure, cholesterol, nutrition, and physical activity. Sites such as the American Medical Women’s Association ([www.amwa-doc.org/publications/healthy\\_eating.htm](http://www.amwa-doc.org/publications/healthy_eating.htm)) contain information on heart-healthy nutrition. Although many sites include information on the prevention of heart disease, the information does not always include suggestions targeted to women. Moreover, on most health sites users need to do quite a bit of searching to locate content on CVD in women because this information is not accessible on main pages.
- Some sites use interactive quizzes or questionnaires to educate and inform the public. For example, Healthgate ([www.bewell.com](http://www.bewell.com)), a commercial Internet-only health site, contains “Check Your Heart Disease I.Q.,” a quiz for women. The Center for Women’s Health and Medicine at Mercy Medical Center in Baltimore, Maryland, has a “Heart Health Quiz” ([www.mdmercy.com/womens/heart/index.asp](http://www.mdmercy.com/womens/heart/index.asp)).
- Personal stories of women with heart disease are also used as teaching tools on several sites, including those of the American Heart Association (AHA) ([www.women.americanheart.org](http://www.women.americanheart.org)) and Cyberdiet ([www.cyberdiet.com](http://www.cyberdiet.com)).
- Many of the sites feature research news about CVD and women. The AHA site contains news releases and current articles on women and heart disease. The Mayo Clinic’s Women’s Health Center site ([www.mayohealth.org/mayo/common/html/womenpg.htm](http://www.mayohealth.org/mayo/common/html/womenpg.htm)) contains current articles and press releases on general health subjects of interest to women, including heart disease. Most of the sites have links to further information. These links were generally to the AHA, NHLBI, and the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases.
- The National Women’s Health Information Center ([www.4woman.org](http://www.4woman.org)), sponsored by the Office on Women’s Health, Department of Health and Human Services, includes the “For Your Heart” Web site, which contains information on all major CVD risk factors in women including high blood pressure, high cholesterol, poor nutrition, lack of physical activity, diabetes, overweight, and stress. The National Women’s Health Resource Center ([www.healthywomen.org](http://www.healthywomen.org)), an online clearinghouse for health information, contains many pages of CVD information targeted to women, as well as links to news items, conferences, and events.

- Many sites of organizations for health professionals had no specific information on CVD in women. When this information was available, it was not accessible from the main page.

### **National-Level Campaigns/Programs**

Many national organizations and membership groups sponsor CVD awareness and prevention programs targeted to women. Occasionally, information on these programs is available on the Internet. The search located many programs that are sponsored by the Federal Government, women's organizations, corporations, voluntary health organizations, and educational institutions. Following are some examples of national-level educational programs:

- AHA sponsors the "Take Wellness to Heart" campaign ([women.americanheart.org/wellness/body.htm](http://women.americanheart.org/wellness/body.htm)). This program, sponsored in part by both Aetna U.S. Healthcare and Wyeth-Ayerst Laboratories, is a comprehensive initiative that aims to raise the awareness of women and their physicians regarding CVD and its risk factors. It includes a toll-free CVD information hotline for women, community-based events like the a "Walking for Wellness Festival" targeted to African American women, and "Choose to Move," a 12-week exercise and behavior modification program.
- The Association of Women's Health, Obstetric, and Neonatal Nurses ([www.awhonn.org](http://www.awhonn.org)), a professional organization of 22,000 nurses, is developing a broad-based CVD education and awareness program. The project, funded by a grant from Pfizer, will focus on educating both primary care nurses and women about the risks of CVD and strategies for preventing it. Outcomes for 2001 include evidence-based clinical practice guidelines as well as a national "state of the science" conference. This is one of the few examples we found of a program that integrated health care providers into the educational process.
- The Center for Women's Healthcare at the Weill Medical College of Cornell University publishes *Women's Health Advisor*. This monthly newsletter often includes articles about CVD risk factors and prevention. A similar newsletter is published by Harvard Medical School (*Harvard Women's Health Watch*). These newsletters often present up-to-date health and research information on CVD to a wide audience of women.
- The National Black Women's Health Project ([www.nbwHP.org](http://www.nbwHP.org)) sponsors a national "Walking for Wellness" program that encourages African American women to incorporate physical activity, good nutrition, and health education into their lives. Additionally, the project has recently begun the Black Women's Wellness Study, funded by the National Institutes of Health, to address physical activity, fitness, eating patterns, and general well-being.
- The American College of Physicians-American Society of Internal Medicine (<http://www.acponline.org>) is a professional organization of more than 115,000 physicians. It recently began a comprehensive national public health education campaign targeting adult women. The campaign will include full-page ads focusing on heart disease and stroke as well as osteoporosis and cancer.

- *The Changing Face of Women's Health* is a traveling exhibit that explores how women's health issues are shaped by the interplay of society, biology, and personal behavior. It is organized around four health factors: risk, prevention, detection, and control. The exhibit, created by the National Health Sciences Consortium, a group of nine science centers, includes a section on women and cardiovascular health. The exhibit began its travels to 10 U.S. cities in 1999; the tour will end in 2002.
- The Alpha Phi Foundation, a fraternity for women whose mission is to fund research and promote educational programs that address cardiac disease in women, disseminates information through newsletters, symposiums, chapter meetings, campus events, awards, community outreach projects, a Web site, and philanthropy projects.
- Several women's magazines have featured comprehensive articles recently about heart disease in women. The November 2000 issue of McCall's, for example, included an 11-page spread devoted to preventing heart disease in women that included signs and symptoms of the disease and a comprehensive discussion of risk-reduction and prevention measures. Another example is an eight-page article, "The Heart Disease Prevention Guide," published in the November 14, 2000, issue of Woman's Day as an ongoing series with the AHA. The magazine also published a one-page article on high blood pressure in the September 1, 2000, issue that included contact information for NHLBI and AHA.

### **Community-Based Programs**

A variety of community-based programs to educate women about CVD and its prevention are being implemented in the United States. Our search found more than 25 such programs. They are funded as research or service programs by the Federal Government, states, corporations, universities, healthcare systems, and others. Some are faith-based programs and many use members of the target community to lead the interventions. Other programs are targeted to women in specific high-risk groups. Examples of community-based education programs include the following:

- The WISEWOMAN program is a large, Federally funded study being conducted in 10 States. WISEWOMAN projects, funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and implemented by state health departments, include CVD screening for low-income and underinsured and uninsured women. As part of the study, women receive either minimum intervention (risk factor assessment, onsite counseling, and referral) or enhanced intervention (screening, counseling, and nutrition and exercise classes). In North Carolina the program has led to the development and implementation of "New Leaf" programs by 33 local health departments. New Leaf is a 12-month program for women that includes diet and physical exercise counseling. The WISEWOMAN study is examining whether identification of CVD risk factors, followed by enhanced intervention and referral, will lead to significant CVD risk reduction. Analysis of results is ongoing and promising.
- Other CDC-funded community-based programs include Project Joy, a 5-year program conducted by African American churches in Baltimore. The study seeks to test the effectiveness of reducing CVD risk through culturally integrated interventions

focusing on nutrition, smoking cessation, and exercise among African American women 40 years of age or older.

- Health Works for Women is an outreach project funded by the University of North Carolina Center for Health Promotion and Disease Prevention. The program focuses on workplace health promotion for women at four worksites. The two major components of the program are recruitment and training of lay health advisors and a computerized health message center.
- Lay health advisors are the focus of the Uniontown Project run by the University of Alabama at Birmingham's Prevention Research Center. The Uniontown Project, funded by the CDC, seeks to develop, implement, and evaluate Community Health Advisor (CHA)-based interventions to reduce CVD in rural African American women over 39 years of age. The Project recruits and trains potential CHAs, who conduct classes in physical activity, smoking cessation, and nutrition as well as leading walking groups and holding food fairs.
- The Sister to Sister Foundation recently launched the Everyone Has a Heart Campaign to address the issue of women and heart disease. The campaign provided free heart disease screenings throughout February 2001 at various locations in and around Washington, D.C. A campaign finale at the MCI Center featured heart screenings, health education materials and presentations, cooking demonstrations, and celebrity appearances. The Foundation plans to take the campaign nationwide and has many partners and sponsors, including NHLBI.
- Pfizer is sponsoring a national cholesterol education campaign targeted to women called "Touching Hearts," which features actress Olympia Dukakis. Campaign activities held in Baltimore in November 2000 included cholesterol screening, educational materials, presentations, prizes, autograph signing by Ms. Dukakis, a reception, and free public transportation to the event.

## References

<sup>1</sup> Monthly News from the U.S. Bureau of the Census. December 1998;33:1.

<sup>2</sup> Mosca L, Jones WK, King K, Ouyand P, Redberg RF, Hill MN. Awareness, perception, and knowledge of heart disease risk and prevention among women in the United States. Arch of Fam Med 2000;9:506-15.