



CSW 67 Gender and Technology Brief

Technology and Health for Women

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Progress has been made- Innovation and technology in the field of women's health is one of the few areas where there has been huge progress in the past twenty years as well as significant changes coming most recently because of the COVID pandemic. But much more needs to be done because progress in technology alone does not ensure widespread access or equal access for women.

Wider Access/ More Women in STEM- Broader internet access and cell phone usage worldwide have changed how medicine is practiced as well as how health information and drugs are disseminated. Telemedicine and "mobile clinics" have expanded access and medical assistance for women and girls that was previously unavailable, particularly in rural areas. In addition, more women are studying science, engineering and medicine and they are teaming up with female entrepreneurs to create new medical devices and innovative treatments specifically designed to serve the current unmet health needs of women and girls.

Expanded Areas of Research- In the past, most health inventions were created by men, and centered on men's health, while innovations for women's health usually centered on young women's fertility and reproductive health. However, with more women in science, medicine and engineering, research on female health has broadened considerably to include menstrual care, sexual health (sex education, STD treatment, contraception), lifelong treatments (menopause) and general wellness including fitness and nutrition. Women researchers have also contributed to new revolutionary techniques for heart illness as well as breast and ovarian cancer treatments.

The Bad News- While all of that is good news, the bad news is that new technology is not always readily available to those in rural areas or poorer areas without reliable internet, access to mobile phones or computers. There are also new major personal privacy concerns about the use of medical data, particularly in countries where medical procedures like abortion are prohibited. Much remains to be done to address the full range of women's health needs and protection of women.

Fast Facts

- Women are 75-85% more likely to use digital tools for their health needs than men.¹
- The global women's health market is estimated to be worth \$297 Billion.²
- FemTech, the industry of women entrepreneurs, invested \$418 M in 2019 specifically in women's health projects; globally the market is slated to reach \$48B Billion by 2025. However, this level of investment represents only 1.8% of total investments in digital health.³
- In the US, 85% of nurses and homecare workers and 90% of dental assistants and medical assistants are women. While the majority of highly paid health professionals - doctors, dentists and optometrists - are still men, women are now the majority of veterinarians and pharmacists. The number of female dentists and optometrists has doubled in recent years, approaching parity in graduate school students.⁴

- Only 25% of US patent holders for drugs and surgical instruments are women. However, when women participate on research teams, they are 35% more likely to develop inventions that could benefit women than the usual “men only” teams.⁵

Recommendations

A) Ensure broader and more equitable *access* to computers, computer training and reliable internet to ensure that new health technologies can reach women of all ages including the most vulnerable, pregnant women and disabled women, so all women's health needs can be met.

B) Increase significantly the investment in women's health research and development to reach parity with men, and include women in the planning, research and development on every health project to ensure women's unique health concerns are addressed.

C) Work collaboratively with grass roots women's organizations, private industry and medical professionals to devise best practices to serve women's health needs including maximizing the expertise of scarce doctors and nurses and streamlining the delivery of services, drugs, and consultations in rural areas.

D) Tighten privacy laws with strict penalties for internet providers and medical professionals to ensure the privacy concerns of all citizens and guarantee that medical information will remain private and not used for marketing, harassment or persecution of any patient.

E) Ensure that women of all ages have full access to affordable medical care and unfettered digital, postal and travel access to full sexual and reproductive services including abortion and contraception, regardless of the country or region they live in.

F) Invest more funds in women's health, particularly in Femtech, and require research projects to include women of all ages in medical trials for drugs, treatments and equipment to determine special effects on women of all ages including pregnant women.

G) Ensure comprehensive internet access to rural areas to facilitate the expansion of telemedicine, and invest in mobile medicine to reach those who need in-person services, particularly pregnant women, handicapped women, and elderly women.

Suggested Readings

Healthcare Information and Management Systems Society (HIMSS) 2020, [Femtech Advancing Women's Health](#)

FemTech Collective 2021. [Is FemTech Addressing Women's Needs?](#)

World Health Organization 2021. [WHO Pledges Extensive Commitments towards Women's Empowerment and Health.](#)

Healthcare Dive 2021, [Why Are Women More Likely to Use Telehealth?](#)

¹ <https://www.himss.org/resources/how-femtech-advancing-womens-health>

² <https://www.himss.org/resources/how-femtech-advancing-womens-health>

³ <https://techhq.com/2021/03/how-will-womens-health-technology-gr>

⁴ <https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2019/08/your-health-care-in-womens-hands.html>

⁵ <https://techhq.com/2021/03/how-will-womens-health-technology-gr>