

# Closing the awareness gap

Heart of a Woman is an innovative, community-based initiative designed to empower women to take charge of their own heart health. Local National Federation of Business and Professional Women clubs (NFBPWC) partner with local heart hospitals to educate women about their gender-specific risk factors, symptoms, and treatments for cardiovascular disease (CVD). NFBPWC gives women the knowledge and tools to lower their risk of CVD and advocate for equality in health care.

## Getting Involved

Are you ready to bring Heart of a Woman home? NFBPWC chapters are encouraged to tailor programs to meet their community's needs, but we offer some tips from the Houston experience to get you started.

- ♥ **Identify marginalized groups.** Research local CVD trends, talk to hospitals, community groups, and local government to find out what the greatest CVD risks are for women in your area.
- ♥ **Partner with a local hospital.** Work with CVD physicians and researchers to develop a program covering the topics most important for your community. Hospitals may also have education departments that can help with the event.
- ♥ **Invite speakers.** Bring top women's heart health experts to speak at your event. You may also want to invite representatives of local government and health advocacy organizations. Your hospital contacts should be able to help find speakers, or you can ask the Houston NFBPWC chapter for suggestions.
- ♥ **Raise funds.** Hold fundraisers or reach out to local businesses to find donors and sponsors.

*For more information and helpful resources, email [info@bpwhouston.org](mailto:info@bpwhouston.org).*



Houston Heart of a Woman organizers, 2018

# Heart of a Woman

Women empowering women to take charge of their heart health



—\*H O U S T O N\*—



## No. 1 Killer

Cardiovascular disease (CVD) now kills 1 in 3 women around the world, making it the number 1 killer of women.<sup>1</sup> Yet most women are unaware of their risk. Studies show that only around half of U.S. women (and 39% of primary care physicians!) rank CVD as their top health risk.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, women are less likely than men to seek medical care, and when they do go to the emergency room, their symptoms are more likely to be misdiagnosed or dismissed.<sup>1</sup>

## Gender-specific symptoms

One of the reasons CVD in women is so often misdiagnosed is because women often exhibit different, more subtle symptoms. If you experience any of the following, seek emergency attention immediately.

- ♥ Chest pain or discomfort (dull or sharp), or pain in the neck, jaw, throat, upper abdomen, or back
- ♥ Indigestion, nausea, or gas-like pain; shortness of breath; lightheadedness, collapse; weakness or fatigue; anxiety or nervousness<sup>3</sup>

*Women can have a heart attack without experiencing chest pain!*

## Deadly Disparities

CVD has long been viewed as a “man’s disease,” leading to decades of gender bias in CVD research, testing, and treatment. According to the American Heart Association “Go Red for Women” campaign<sup>1</sup>:

- ♥ Women are less likely than men to survive their first heart attack.
- ♥ Women are less likely to receive the most aggressive diagnostic testing and treatment.
- ♥ Women have been underrepresented in CVD research, making up only 38% of participants.
- ♥ Only 1/4 of CVD clinical trials report sex-specific results that show effects on women.

## Racial and socioeconomic disparities

- ♥ Hispanic women develop heart disease a decade earlier than white women, but are the least likely to have a regular health care provider.<sup>1</sup>
- ♥ Black women have a disproportionately high risk of death from CVD.<sup>4</sup>
- ♥ Worldwide, underserved communities account for 80% of all CVD deaths.<sup>4</sup>



CVD is not a one-size-fits-all disease—but it often receives one-size-fits-all research and treatment. Thus, it is vitally important to educate women about their risks and how they can protect themselves. NFBPWC is uniquely positioned to reach women with community-centered events to raise awareness about women and CVD.

## Heart of a Woman

The first Heart of a Woman conference was hosted by the Houston, Texas chapter of NFBPWC in collaboration with the Houston Methodist DeBakey Heart & Vascular Center. On March 6, 2018, over 130 women and men participated in a free, one-day conference at the Houston Methodist Research Institute. NFBPWC members worked with Houston Methodist physicians to create an exciting educational program featuring world-renowned women’s heart health experts. Topics included:

- ♥ Signs and symptoms of CVD in women
- ♥ Women-specific risk factors, prevention, testing, and treatment
- ♥ Gender biases in health care research, education, and funding

## Sources:

1. Go Red for Women. [www.goredforwomen.org](http://www.goredforwomen.org)
2. Bairey Merz CN, et al. Knowledge, Attitudes, and Beliefs Regarding Cardiovascular Disease in Women: The Women’s Heart Alliance. *J Am Coll Cardiol.* 2017 Jul 11;70(2):123-132.
3. World Heart Federation. [www.world-heart-federation.org](http://www.world-heart-federation.org)
4. Graham G. Disparities in Cardiovascular Disease Risk in the United States. *Curr Cardiol Rev.* 2015;11(3)238-245.