Women First Research Coalition

December 12, 2025

Dr. Jay Bhattacharya
Director
National Institutes of Health
9000 Rockville Pike
Bethesda, Maryland 20892

Dear Dr. Bhattacharya,

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) is at an inflection point right now as there currently are twelve open NIH leadership positions, including eleven Institute and Center director openings, a significant portion of the overall NIH leadership. This is an excellent opportunity for NIH to transform itself for the better under your leadership. Filling these important roles with well-qualified, experienced scientists will be important in rebuilding public trust in NIH and other public health authorities in America, which we know is one of your priorities as the NIH Director.

As NIH begins the hiring process for open NIH leadership positions, we, the Women First Research Coalition (WFRC), strongly urge you to consider qualified candidates with OB/GYN specialty and expertise in women's health research for these roles, particularly for the leadership positions at the *Eunice Kennedy Shriver* National Institute of Child Health and Human Development. WFRC is a coalition comprised of the nation's leading professional medical and research organizations specializing in women's health. Our coalition was formed to address pressing challenges in women's health research and to raise awareness about the need for sustained and strengthened investment in the prioritization of research in conditions that are specific to women or those conditions that may present differently in women than men. We also aim to advance a research platform that improves the health outcomes of women and ensures an adequate research workforce focused on these key issues. We believe robust, sustained, and predictable funding is important for all biomedical research.

Better understanding and improving women's health, including reproductive health, is crucial not only for women, but also for families, societies, and the economy. For instance, maternal health plays a critical role in the health of a woman during pregnancy and throughout her life course, as well as for the health of her children. However, the United States has significantly higher infant and maternal mortality rates than most high-income countries around the world[1], and women's health continues to be understudied, with the proportion of federal investment in its research having decreased between Fiscal Years 2013-2023 despite a huge increase in the total NIH budget over that period.[2]

[1] Evan D. Gumas, Munira Z. Gunja, and Irene Papanicolas, *Maternal and Child Mortality: How Do U.S. States Compare Internationally?* (Commonwealth Fund, Oct. 2025). https://doi.org/10.26099/jhr7-k178

[2] National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. 2025. A new vision for women's health research: Transformative change at the National Institutes of Health. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. https://doi.org/10.17226/28586

Furthermore, both strategic plans developed by the *Eunice Kennedy Shriver* National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD), and the Office of Research on Women's Health (ORWH) align in their emphasis for the need to advance and increase attention to research on gynecologic health and disease in women of all ages. We wholeheartedly agree with one of the objectives under Strategic Goal 4 in NIH-Wide Strategic Plan for Research on the Health of Women that one of the major focus areas should be on expanding research on female-specific conditions and diseases, including reproductive, maternal, and gynecologic health. This will help advance research in several understudied areas in female reproductive health and illness, such as menstruation, infertility, pregnancy, lactation, and menopause.

OB/GYNs have been historically underrepresented in leadership roles at NIH. We believe that the time is long overdue for a well-qualified individual with OB/GYN expertise to serve as Institute Director or Deputy. An NIH leader with OB/GYN expertise who truly appreciates the need for sustained and strengthened support for women's health research will bring a meaningful and balanced perspective to the current and future research funded at NIH and accelerate our progress towards the aforementioned goals outlined in NIH's Strategic Plans, ultimately helping to improve the health of all Americans.

We ask that you and the hiring committees consider our request as the hiring process moves forward. Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully,

Brett Einerson, MD, MPH, FACOG
Chair, Women First Research Coalition

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