

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

November 17, 2014

The Honorable Sylvia Burwell
Secretary
Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Ave SW
Room 639G
Washington, DC 20201-0001

Dear Secretary Burwell:

We are writing to urge the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to prioritize combating the number one killer of women in this country: heart disease. Unfortunately, women's heart disease continues to be under-researched, misdiagnosed, and left untreated too often. While not enough is being done to recognize the differences and appropriately treat heart disease in women, we believe that your leadership could have a huge impact on combating women's cardiovascular disease.

Heart disease kills more women than all cancers combined and, since 1984, more women than men have died from heart disease. Yet, for the last 50 years, women's heart treatment has largely been based on medical research on men – often to negative results. For example, 42 percent of women who have a heart attack die within one year, as compared to 24 percent of men. We also know that women have more repeat heart attacks and greater risk of stroke after a heart attack.

Similar to how we worked alongside non-profit leaders to change the trajectory of breast cancer, we know that the federal government can make a significant impact with a targeted investment in research and programs that will save women's lives. We request that you examine the programs under your purview in an effort to direct more resources toward women's cardiovascular disease.

Specifically, we encourage HHS to consider the following recommendations:

- Require all research conducted by HHS, CDC, FDA, and CMS follow the NIH standard to require inclusion of women in all phases of heart health research and analyze and publish gender-specific data.
- Utilize the FY2015 *Affordable Care Act* Prevention Fund specifically for women's heart health. Given that women represent more than half of the U.S. population, and one in three women die from heart disease, we respectfully request that there be greater fairness in the allocation of funding directed toward proven women's heart health prevention, education, and research programs at HHS.
- Review and ensure that the *Affordable Care Act* guidelines for Well Woman exams cover best practices for women's cardiovascular disease diagnosis and treatment.

- Consider expanding WISEWOMAN to additional highest-need states. WISEWOMAN – a screening program at CDC for low-income and uninsured women that is well-regarded across both sides of the aisle – is currently operational and effective in 20 states. During this budget cycle, we request that the CDC examine its budget to expand WISEWOMAN to seven of the highest-need states every year that currently do not have WISEWOMAN.

Every minute, a woman dies from heart disease. We cannot let another year pass with 400,000 more women dying because these disparities are not addressed. We hope that under your tenure, HHS will make researching and treating women’s cardiovascular disease a top priority. Thank you for your consideration of our comments and we stand ready to work with you to identify areas where we can address this important issue.

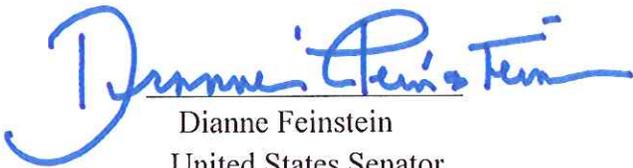
Sincerely,



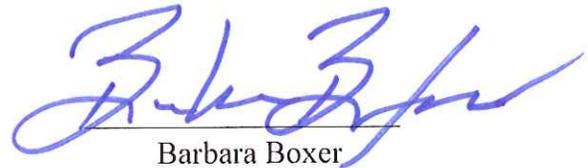
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