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**WOMENHEART ISSUES POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS TO IMPROVE ACCESS TO  
HEALTH CARE FOR WOMEN WITH HEART DISEASE**

*Recommendations Follow Survey and Focus Group Feedback, Indicating that Women  
Consistently Experience Cost and Access Issues, Even When Insured*

**Washington, DC, May 2, 2017** – WomenHeart: The National Coalition for Women with Heart Disease, today announced policy recommendations to guide Congressional action to improve healthcare access for women living with heart disease. The recommendations were created as part of WomenHeart’s Access Now! Campaign, a multi-year initiative to determine if women with heart disease have access to the health care and treatment that they need.

“Heart disease is the leading cause of death among women,” said Mary McGowan, CEO for WomenHeart. “Nearly 48 million women are living with or at risk for heart disease, which means it directly or indirectly impacts every American. At a time when healthcare faces an uncertain future, it is essential that Congress does all it can to improve the heart health of our mothers, sisters, spouses and daughters.”

WomenHeart recommends that Congress:

- ♥ Enact legislation that provides insurance plans with premiums women can afford, and benefit packages that allow access to the appropriate, sex- and gender-specific diagnostic testing, drugs, devices and treatments
- ♥ Take action to address measures to reduce out of pocket costs for co-payments, co-insurance and deductibles
- ♥ Require transparency for insurance benefit plans and costs so that women can compare plans and choose the one that will work for them
- ♥ Pass HR 1155, to amend title XVIII of the Social Security Act to allow physician assistants, nurse practitioners, and clinical nurse specialists to supervise cardiac, intensive cardiac, and pulmonary rehabilitation programs, which will make these vital programs more widely available, particularly in rural areas
- ♥ Expand reimbursement for cardiac rehabilitation to a wider range of cardiac conditions, with lower co-pays and deductibles
- ♥ Work with insurance companies to minimize administrative barriers to receiving evidenced-based diagnostic testing, drugs, devices and treatments, including standardizing preauthorization forms

The recommendations were created through a robust process that considered the perspectives of patients, advocates, medical professionals, researchers and health policy specialists. As a first step, WomenHeart completed a literature review and developed an online survey to learn about the experiences and perceptions of women with heart disease related to their access to health care.

Following the survey, WomenHeart hosted a series of in-person and telephone focus groups to further explore the survey responses.

There was consistent feedback between the focus group and survey participants. Most notably, participants repeatedly indicated that having insurance does not eliminate access issues, and that despite having the means and knowledge to pursue access and coverage, participants still experienced frustrations with access and cost.

The results of the survey and focus groups were then reviewed and discussed at a Key Opinion Leaders (KOL) meeting in Washington, D.C., where recommendations for action were developed. Representatives from a total of 22 organizations participated in the meeting, including the American Heart Association, The FH Foundation, the Association of Black Cardiologists, Aetna, National Women's Law Center and the National Forum for Heart Disease and Stroke Prevention.

#### **About the Survey and Focus Groups**

The survey was launched in February 2017 and sent to WomenHeart's database, partner organizations and social media channels. A total of 480 respondents met the inclusion criteria and completed the survey.

Survey participants mirrored the demographics of the average US cardiac care population:

- Greater percentage aged 65+
- Less employed
- More reliant on Medicare
- Lower household incomes

Participation in the survey and focus groups was limited to females diagnosed with a cardiovascular or heart disease. Focus group participants were members of the WomenHeart community. Since the respondents to the online survey and members of the focus group were not randomly selected, the study does not reflect a statistical representation of the population of the United States.

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#### **About WomenHeart: The National Coalition for Women with Heart Disease**

WomenHeart: The National Coalition for Women with Heart Disease is the nation's only patient centered organization serving the nearly 48 million American women living with or at risk for heart disease – the leading cause of death in women. WomenHeart is solely devoted to advancing women's heart health through advocacy, community education, and the nation's only patient support network for women living with heart disease. WomenHeart is both a coalition and a community of thousands of members nationwide, including women heart patients and their families, physicians, and health advocates, all committed to helping women live longer, healthier lives. To receive a free online heart health action kit or to donate, visit [www.womenheart.org](http://www.womenheart.org).