



Women in Global Health
Contact: Roopa Dhatt
roopa.dhatt@womeningh.org

INFORMATION IS POWER, AND WOMEN ARE THE ANSWER: NEW RESEARCH RELEASED ON ACCESS TO DIAGNOSTIC TESTING

[RELEASED: November 11, 2020] - Last week, the 73rd World Health Assembly reconvened at the same time COVID-19 infections topped 50 million. Although the world continues to grapple with the response and impacts of the crisis, this pandemic has led to a global focus on testing, which had previously been overlooked and underfunded in global health priorities. However, women still face disproportionate barriers to access to testing and services, and the World Health Organization estimates that around half of the world's population lacks full coverage of essential health services. On Monday, Women in Global Health - an organization leading the global movement for gender equality in health - partnered with The Foundation For Innovative New Diagnostics (FIND) to release breaking new research and novel findings on diagnostic testing and women's empowerment.

The joint report, "[Health in Their Hands: Testing & Women's Empowerment Means Better Health For All](#)", is the first comprehensive evidence gathering and analysis of the barriers to testing for women, and revealed new findings on a shocking diagnosis gap in low- and middle-income countries. The report not only acknowledged the sobering reality of drastic testing inequalities that restrict access for women but also provided key recommendations for how health systems can accommodate women's testing needs while involving them in the process.

With a focus on low- and middle- income countries, the research exposed the fact that women cannot access the tests they need, putting themselves and their communities at risk, and will undermine universal health coverage if not addressed. These barriers for women and challenges of the testing gap include societal gender inequalities that prevent women from accessing information, lack of investment in women's diagnostic testing, gender biases that hinder accuracy in diagnoses, low health literacy, lack of trust and fear, and lack of data and research on testing for women.

Women in Global Health and FIND used a variety of case studies from around the world to assess these gaps, especially in low- and middle-income countries. A study in Senegal found that only 13% of women received the complete set of antenatal tests recommended in pregnancy, while in a study of pregnant women in Southwest Nigeria, 97% reported relying on their husbands for money to access antenatal testing and care. Lack of accessible reproductive health testing and screenings such as these threaten the health of women and hinder gender equality.

How can we overcome this? The report makes a series of recommendations such as increasing investment in self-testing and tests that can be taken to women at home or work, making testing locations and services more accessible to women, and most importantly, ensuring that women are the ones driving this change in health and diagnostic systems. *"Women should be the drivers of diagnostics. They are at the heart of delivery. From being pharmacists to nurses, and laboratory technicians, in addition to wives and daughters who often take care of the sick. They must be at the center of testing policies and procedures"*, says Dr. Aminata Touré, Special Envoy of President Macky Sall for Internal and External Affairs.

By putting health in their hands, women have more control to manage their health and their lives. There is hope that this breaking new research will start the global conversation on testing gaps, and lead to increased investment in women's health through testing while highlighting the role women play as drivers of diagnostic testing for the whole of society.

"Information is power: Testing empowers women with critical health information that improves lives and increases prosperity for all," says Roopa Dhatt, Co-Founder and Executive Director of Women in Global Health. *"Women in low- and middle-income countries face the greatest burden of infections and non-communicable diseases – and have the least access to diagnostic testing,"* adds Catharina Boehme, CEO of FIND. *"But it's clear that testing can empower women, and empowering women can increase testing for all."*

Read the full report here: www.womeningh.org/testing

###

About Women in Global Health

Women in Global Health (WGH) is a US 501(c)(3) founded in 2015 to achieve gender equality in global health leadership. Today, WGH is a global movement with the largest network of women and allies, more than 24+ chapters, 35,000 supporters across more than 90 countries, and continues to grow, with a strong presence in low- and middle-income countries. The global teamwork with a network of WGH chapters in every region to challenge power and privilege for gender equity in health by mobilizing a diverse group of emerging women health leaders, by advocating to existing global health leaders to commit to transforming their own institutions, and by holding these leaders to account. * WGH chapters have been established in Australasia, Canada, Chile, Finland, Germany, India, Ireland, Norway, Pakistan, Portugal, Somalia, Sweden, and the USA, with Cameroon, China, Malawi, Nigeria, South Africa, UK, and Zambia under development. WGH also has regional affiliates in East and West Africa.--

About FIND

FIND is a global non-profit organization that drives innovation in the development and delivery of diagnostics to combat major diseases affecting the world's poorest populations. Our work bridges R&D to access, overcoming scientific barriers to technology development; generating evidence for regulators and policymakers; addressing market failures; and enabling accelerated uptake and access to

diagnostics in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs). Since 2003, we have been instrumental in the development of 24 new diagnostic tools used in 150 LMICs. Over 50 million FIND-supported products have been provided to our target markets since the start of 2015. A WHO Collaborating Centre, we work with more than 200 academic, industry, governmental, and civil society partners worldwide, on over 70 active projects that cross six priority disease areas. FIND is committed to a future in which diagnostics underpin treatment decisions and provide the foundation for disease surveillance, control, and prevention.