

**GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
MINISTRY OF HEALTH AND FAMILY WELFARE
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH RESEARCH**

**RAJYA SABHA
UNSTARRED QUESTION NO. 1902
TO BE ANSWERED ON 16TH DECEMBER, 2025**

GENDER BIAS IN MEDICAL RESEARCH AND WOMEN'S HEALTH OUTCOMES

1902. SHRI MALLIKARJUN KHARGE:

Will the Minister of **HEALTH AND FAMILY WELFARE** be pleased to state:

- (a) whether Government is aware of the persistent gender bias in medical research and clinical trials that disadvantages women, especially in heart disease, autoimmune disorders, chronic pain etc;
- (b) whether the proportion of publicly funded medical research in the country is specifically dedicated to women's health issues, if so, the details thereof during the last five years, year-wise;
- (c) the steps being taken to ensure that clinical trials and public health research include adequate female representation, consider sex-specific symptoms and analyse data by gender; and
- (d) whether there is a proposal to establish or strengthen a regulatory or oversight mechanism to actively address gender bias in medical research and treatment guidelines?

ANSWER

**THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF HEALTH AND FAMILY WELFARE
(SHRI PRATAPRAO JADHAV)**

(a) and (b): The Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) has informed that the sex- and gender-related considerations in biomedical research including variations in disease manifestation and treatment outcomes among women has been noted in scientific literature globally. The ICMR biomedical ethics guidelines (2017) operates within an ethical framework that biomedical research should be conducted ethically, respecting participant rights and ensuring fairness which suggests, in principle, that exclusion or unfair bias (including on grounds such as sex or gender) should be avoided, especially where it undermines justice or equitable participant protection. Research supported through ICMR spans a wide range of biomedical and public health domains like heart disease, autoimmune disorders, chronic pain etc. and funding decisions are driven by scientific merit, evidence-based priorities and national health needs. ICMR grants have substantially increased in the last 5 years, from Rs 2358 Crore in 2021-22 to Rs 3125.50 Cr in 2025-26. A multitude of research projects involving women's health issues are supported by ICMR through extramural and intramural health research programmes. ICMR also has National Institute of Research in Reproductive and Child Health (ICMR-NIRRH) in Mumbai which works to

improve women's reproductive health as well as address child health issues through research, education, and healthcare services. A total of Rs 304.35 Crores have been spent by NIRRH in last 5 years. The details are in Annexure I.

Further, the Department of Health Research (DHR) runs Women Scientist Program under its scheme 'Human Resource Development for Health Research'. The Programme is designed for those women researchers who have had a career break arising out of motherhood and family responsibilities etc. Such women scientists are encouraged to return and pursue their career in biomedical research. Since 2021-22, fellowships worth 50.43 Crore Rupees have been given and 215 women scientists in the country have been supported.

The Department of Biotechnology (DBT) in Ministry of Science and Technology has informed that it has a dedicated vertical under Health, wellness and Medical Intervention Directorate for "Women and Child Health Research". Over the years several focused programs including large multi-centric clinical cohort have been funded. A total of Rs 50.5 Crores have been spent by DBT on Women health related projects in last 5 years. The details are in Annexure II.

(c) and (d): ICMR's National Ethical Guidelines for Biomedical and Health Research require that participant selection in clinical and public-health research be fair, scientifically justified and free from unwarranted exclusion of any group including women. Ethics Committees are mandated to review study protocols to ensure appropriate recruitment strategies, adequate safeguards and protection of participant rights and welfare. Where sex or gender differences may influence disease patterns or outcomes, investigators are encouraged to consider these factors in study design and to undertake sex-disaggregated analyses when relevant.

The National Ethics Committee Registry for Biomedical and Health Research (NECRBHR), established under the Department of Health Research has been operational since September 2019, as per the 'New Drugs and Clinical Trials Rules, 2019.' Ethics Committees (ECs) engaged in the review of biomedical and health research involving human participants are required to register with the Department of Health Research. Since its inception, NECRBHR has registered a total of 1,793 ethics committees.

ANNEXURES REFERRED TO IN REPLY TO PART (a) and (b) OF THE RAJYA SABHA UNSTARRED QUESTION NO. 1902 FOR 16.12.2025 REGARDING GENDER BIAS IN MEDICAL RESEARCH AND WOMEN'S HEALTH OUTCOMES

Annexure I

ICMR National Institute of Research in Reproductive and Child Health (ICMR-NIRRH) MUMBAI expenditure in Last 5 years	
Amt. in crores	
Years	Actual Expenditure
2020-21	54.82
2021-22	58.48
2022-23	61.00
2023-24	55.72
2024-25	74.33

Annexure II

Department of Biotechnology (DBT) expenditure on women health related projects in last 5 years	
Amt. in crores	
Years	Actual Expenditure
2020-21	6.67
2021-22	36.59
2022-23	0.93
2023-24	2.97
2024-25	3.34
