

## The BROACH Initiative: Reaching More Young Women with Heart Disease Screenings

According to the American Heart Association's Heart and Stroke Statistics 2019 Update, the news about Americans' current heart health is eye-opening: Nearly half of all adults in the United States (48 percent, or 121.5 million in 2016) have some type of heart disease. Even more startling: Between 2013 and 2016, among females age 20 and older, nearly 45 percent had some form of heart disease. While many people often think of heart disease as something that primarily affects older men, the reality is that too many sisters, daughters and mothers are dying from heart disease, and at younger ages.

At the Minneapolis Heart Institute Foundation® (MHIF), our vision is to create a world without heart and vascular disease. As part of our work, we're proud to be leading research and education to significantly improve the outlook for women and their heart health. Through our emerging [Women's Cardiovascular Science Center](#), our goal is to advance the understanding of heart disease in women, how to prevent it, and how to optimize patient care. The new women's science center builds upon MHIF's proven track record in conducting innovative, evidence-based research and then translating that evidence to improve knowledge and enhance patient care.

### Raising awareness among both patients and providers

One of MHIF's initiatives focused particularly on younger women is called [BROACH: Broadening the Role of Ob-Gyns in Assessing Cardiovascular Health](#). It's designed to improve the rate of heart disease screening for women since prevention efforts can significantly decrease the incidence of disease. Young women who follow a healthy lifestyle have an almost 75 percent reduction in heart disease and its risk factors (high blood pressure, diabetes and high cholesterol).

"Because heart disease often goes undiagnosed in women, it's critical to raise awareness among both patients and their providers about the importance of



heart disease screening and prevention in young women," said Dr. Retu Saxena, a Minneapolis Heart Institute® cardiologist with a particular interest in women's health. "We know that more than two-thirds of women, particularly

young women, see an ob-gyn as their only health care provider. Yet screening for heart disease and helping women manage their risk factors hasn't traditionally been part of an ob-gyn's role."

### Pregnancy-induced complications increase a woman's health risks

BROACH began with a survey of ob-gyn practitioners throughout Minnesota to better understand the gaps they face in addressing their patients' cardiovascular-related needs. The results showed that in addition to limited time, significant barriers to screening patients for cardiovascular disease included providers' lack of confidence in managing risk, and lack of adequate resources.

Based on those findings, MHIF's Women's Heart Health Team developed educational materials for both [patients](#) and [providers](#) to facilitate critical conversations about heart disease and risk factors. In April 2019, the team began conducting a series of trainings with ob-gyn and women's care practitioners to help them better manage risk among their patients and provide them with guidance tools.

In particular, BROACH's educational materials and trainings focus on the many pregnancy-induced conditions that increase a woman's health risks immediately following delivery of a baby and for many years to come.

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Pregnancy is often thought of as a woman's first 'stress test' that can unmask underlying heart and vascular problems and future risk. For women who are pregnant, it's important to understand the long-term heart and vascular impacts that can result from pregnancy-induced conditions, including high blood pressure, preeclampsia, gestational diabetes, as well as having a pre-term baby or spontaneous birth. For providers, there is a significant opportunity to improve screening practices post-partum and to make appropriate referrals to primary care providers, cardiologists, dietitians and lifestyle coaches.

"Most young women, whether pregnant or not, simply don't know that heart disease will be their greatest health threat," said Gretchen Benson, RD, CDE, MHIF's population health program manager. "They don't realize that the behaviors they have in their 20s and 30s — such

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as smoking and being inactive — will greatly impact their heart health and heart disease risk later in life. They may not realize that a family history of heart disease, or a pregnancy-induced complication, is a major risk factor. And for many women, it can be all too easy to focus on the needs of others while putting their own needs — including health care — aside. Our goal is to ensure that all young women can identify their risks early, become empowered to lead more healthful lives, and help prevent heart disease from developing."



For more information on BROACH and MHIF's Women's Cardiovascular Science Center, visit [www.mplsheart.org/women](http://www.mplsheart.org/women).