

Perspectives.

A leading look at healthcare by Bupa Global.

# Women's Health: It's a biased business

Insights from the latest Perspectives by Bupa Global event | October 2022

Over the past few years, diversity, equity and inclusion has risen to the top of the global business agenda, with many organisations realising that they need to prioritise the wellbeing of all their people.

**For our 9th Perspectives by Bupa Global event we focused on women's health, and how generations of women are being held back in the workplace, or leaving altogether because of a lack of understanding and support for their unique health needs.**

Women account for 48% of the global workforce, so it's not surprising this topic is right at the heart of the inclusive health agenda. And whilst in recent years it's important to acknowledge that we've seen some positive progress on women's health, overall it still isn't being taken seriously enough by employers and healthcare providers. Until we address the impact of inequality around women's health, we'll never be able to create truly successful, sustainable, and diverse workplaces.

The time to act is now. There's a huge opportunity for the healthcare industry to work with employers to break the bias. We have a responsibility to challenge the taboos around talking about women's health conditions, we must invest in more progressive health benefits that support women throughout all their key life stages and we must work with employers to change the conversation.



**Dr Paula Franklin**  
Group Chief Medical Officer  
Bupa Group

**“Treating people equitably is not treating them all the same. It's recognising their differences and different needs and treating them accordingly.”**

## How did we end up with such a stark gender health gap?

The reasons are complex.

It's true that women live longer than men in most societies but they still often experience poorer outcomes than men – particularly in their healthcare journey. A variety of studies have shown a gender health gap exists, which is being driven by:

- **Societal, cultural, gender and biological issues.** But this should never excuse inequality - rather a recognition that the approach to achieving the same outcome may need to be different
  - A **lack of research into women's health conditions** mean many symptoms go unrecognised and women don't receive the right treatments at the right time
- There's evidence that women are **less likely to be taken seriously by medical professionals**
- **Chronic underfunding for women's health** means a lack of new treatments and long waiting lists for current treatments. This has recently got worse, due to the pandemic

**Women are more likely to live with chronic health conditions, and disabilities<sup>1</sup>.**

**A US study in 2020<sup>2</sup> showed women are more likely to suffer the adverse side effects of medications because dosages have historically been based on male clinical trials.**

**Women in the US and the UK are significantly more likely than men to be misdiagnosed for a stroke or heart attack<sup>3</sup>.**

## The opportunity for healthcare

As an industry, we've failed to support women fully for generations.

Global healthcare systems are just not designed to meet women's day-to-day needs. All too often women are forced to navigate their way around multiple different health professionals, and facilities, trying to access basic services to maintain their health and wellbeing.

The healthcare industry needs a fresh approach to women's health. We must consider how we can provide more progressive benefits such as maternity and menopause cover, and fertility tests and treatments. An increased breadth of cover empowers businesses to send a clear signal to current employees, and future talent, that they take their health and wellbeing seriously regardless of their individual needs.

It's wrong that any woman is having to pass on opportunities for promotion at work because of a lack of support and it's inexcusable that some women are having to leave the workforce altogether.

**“Systems have been designed around men to suit men, we just need to redesign that balance, address that balance, systems designed around women to support them are going to look a bit different, and are going to be unique to women.”**

**Leila Thabet**  
Founder and CEO, Naytal

**Almost all women will experience menopause, and severely impact a woman's quality of life, and ability to have progressive menopause policies.**

**“Health insurance is instrumental in helping to progress change for women. We need a fresh look at healthcare benefits, reinventing cover to ensure we adequately provide for these conditions that are particularly focused on women.”**

**Dr Paula Franklin**  
Chief Medical Officer, Bupa

**Miscarriage affects millions of women globally every year, and is a common complication of pregnancy. Yet it remains a taboo subject, rarely discussed due to embarrassment, distress and even shame, especially in the workplace.**

**This is the moment where the IPMI industry can step up to make a meaningful difference to a generation of women and give real value to our customers.**



**Leila Thabet**  
Founder and CEO  
Naytal

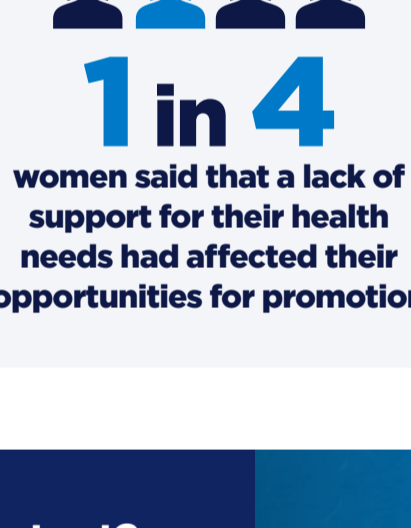
**“A lot of the really critical times in our reproductive health journey coincide with what you might call the “peak years” in your career. There is a real need for businesses to think about how they support women and structure their benefits because we know that better gender diversity in the workplace, leads to better business outcomes.”**

## The role of workplaces

Over recent years we've seen greater recognition of the importance of women's health. It's now more of a priority for the most progressive employers, but it's still not high enough on the business agenda. Many women are still passed over for the most senior leadership roles with only one in four female employees making it to executive level.

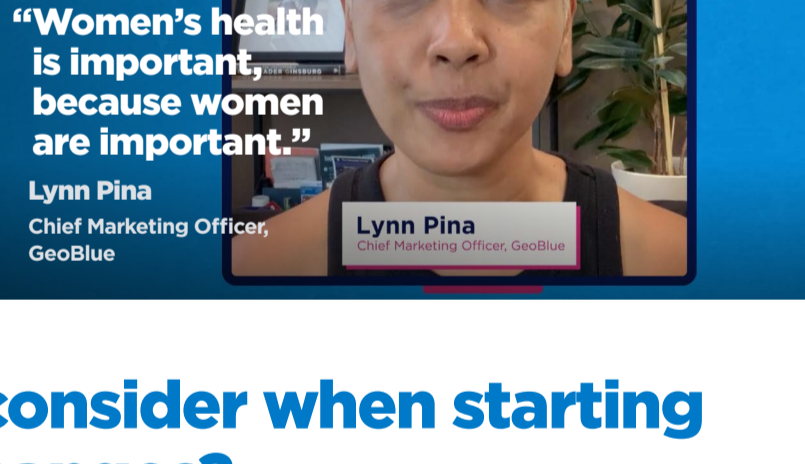
Research suggests that greater female representation in executive roles means, **better long-term financial performance, greater investment in innovation** and **more positive workplace culture**.

But women are still being failed. A significant majority of women in a recent UK government study<sup>4</sup> reported that their health had impacted their experience at work.



**Why is Women's Health important?**

At the event we were able to share some powerful personal experiences from a cross section of people, bringing to life the realities of being a woman in the workplace and the health inequalities they face.



**Lynn Pina**  
Chief Marketing Officer, GeoBlue

## What should businesses consider when starting to make changes?

The business case is stronger than ever. Companies with more than 30 percent women on their executive teams are significantly more likely to outperform those with less.<sup>5</sup>

Improving women's health is not only the right thing to do, but it makes business, and economic, sense.

**Management training is key**

Ensuring managers can support women in the workplace, starting by increasing awareness around women's health issues.

**Open up the conversation**

Create an environment where women feel confident to speak-up. Listen with respect, without judgement, and empathise.

**Digitise**

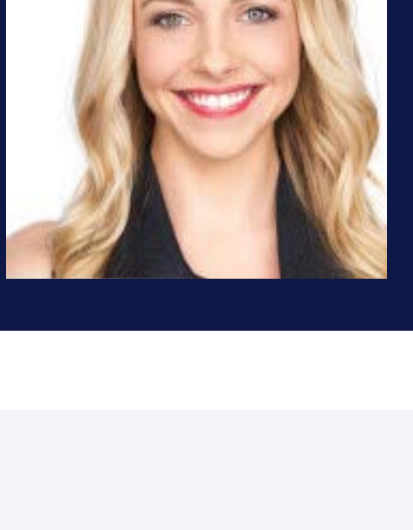
Digital platforms start to level the playing field. Digital can transform support for women, giving the opportunity to not only improve the experience but educate.

**Choice**

Every woman has their own unique journey through their health lifecycle, it is important to make sure you personalise and tailor your workplace offering to support women through that journey. You'll see the results in terms of retention, productivity and engagement from your workforce.

**“The more we see these issues, like menopause in the workplace, and the hindrance it has on GDP, the more we start to see (women's health) get attention...the only way we can break those stigmas is if we all start to have these conversations.”**

**Kaitlyn Tuson**  
Women's Health Champion, Marketing Executive and Brand Strategist



## Starting the conversation

We must consider that we have a collective duty to ensure another generation of women don't experience the same bias as those who have come before.

Ahead of the event we polled our LinkedIn audience and found that 75% are not comfortable openly talking about women's health in the workplace<sup>6</sup>, with a further 69% telling us that their workplace does not provide sufficient support for women's health<sup>7</sup>, these findings are supported by a recent gov.uk survey that found that 65% of women said they felt uncomfortable talking about their health<sup>8</sup>.

There is significant innovation and investment beginning to filter through, and more businesses understand the importance of supporting women's health, but to achieve sustainable change, it's vital we recognise that better health for women is everyone's responsibility.

Together, we can make a long-standing impact, and we need your help to drive this agenda forward within your own businesses and also those of the clients you represent.

**What benefits do you offer your workforce around women's health and does this meet your employee's needs?**

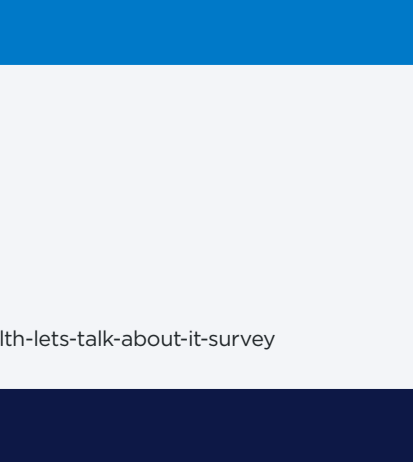
**How do you promote women's health benefits to your workforce and educate them around preventative health in the workplace?**

**How does your workforce engage with women's health information and advice? Is your current product offering enough choice?**

**Let's work together to change the conversation.**

**“Getting women's health right is everyone's responsibility. If we get it right for women, then everyone benefits.”**

**Dr Luke James**  
Deputy Group Chief Medical Officer and Director of Healthcare Transformation  
Bupa Group



**Interested in hearing more?**

You can view the full event recording [here](#) and sign up below to be the first to know about future events from Perspectives by Bupa Global.

<sup>1</sup> <https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0150120#pone.0150120.ref011>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2020/08/20200812161318.htm>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.bmj.com/content/369/bmj.m1175#ref-16>

<sup>4</sup> Results of the 'Women's Health - Let's talk about it' survey - GOV.UK ([www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk))

<sup>5</sup> McKinsey, 'Diversity Wins' report May 2020

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.linkedin.com/feed/update/urn:li:activity:6976102224594669568>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.linkedin.com/feed/update/urn:li:activity:6975374694925377536>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/womens-health-strategy-call-for-evidence/outcome/results-of-the-womens-health-lets-talk-about-it-survey>