



# Women's Health 2023: Key Trends in How Women Find and Access Care





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# Introduction

*Healthgrades’ recent women’s health research shows that women aren’t taking care of themselves as they should. Here’s how health system and pharma marketers can help.*

Health system and pharma marketers help patients prioritize wellness and make confident healthcare decisions, but it’s recently become clear that one group needs extra attention—women.

Healthgrades collected women’s health data from multiple original studies to learn more about how women take care of their health, their most prominent obstacles to care, and what hospitals and pharmaceutical companies can do to serve women better. From post-pandemic perceptions to DEI concerns, take a look at some of our most significant findings and find out how you can help women live well.

# Painting the Picture: Current Trends in Women's Healthcare



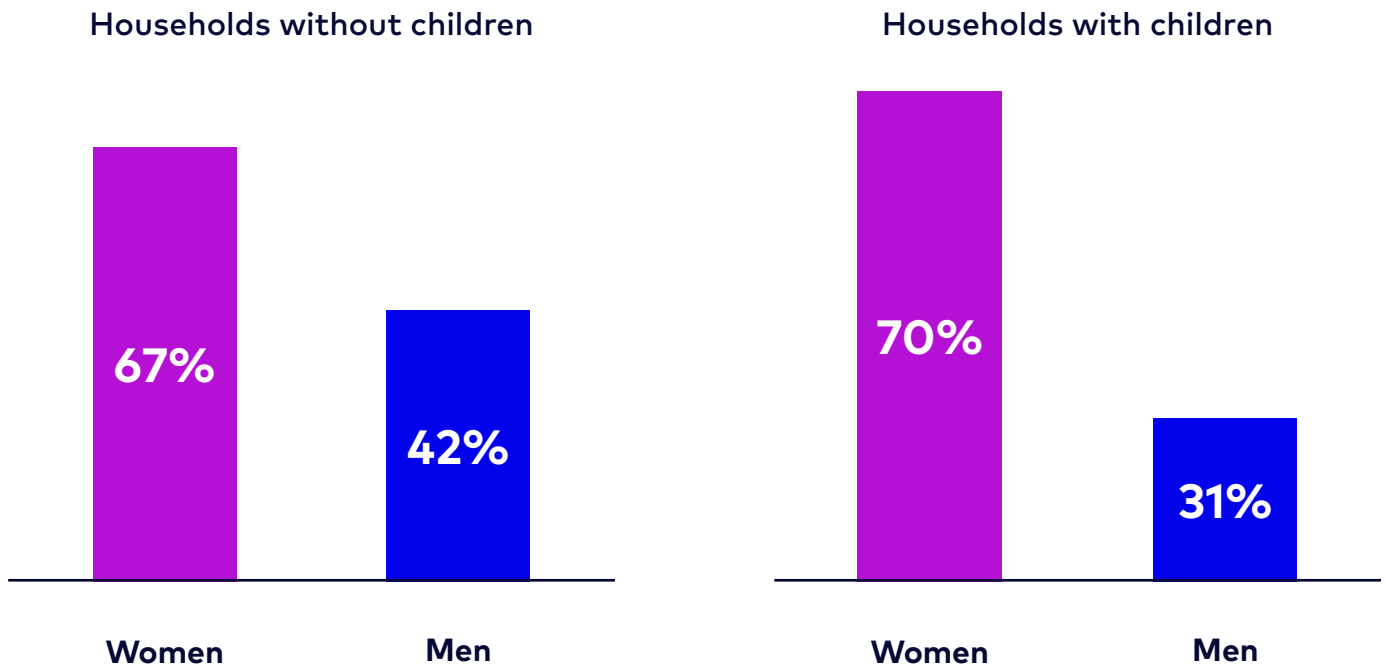
In July 2022, Healthgrades asked 1,217 patients about their medical experiences over the last 12 months to learn about women's perspectives on healthcare. Respondents to our Women's Health Research study included men, women, and transgender people across ethnicities, races, regions, age groups, and income levels.<sup>1</sup> Our study revealed that many women continue to focus on being healthcare advocates for their loved ones—but not for themselves.

## Women are the Chief Healthcare Officers of their households



Around 67% of all women are primary managers of healthcare tasks in their household, compared to 42% of all men.<sup>2</sup> This difference becomes more significant when children are present in the home, with 70% of women and only 31% of men adopting the role of a healthcare leader.<sup>3</sup>

### Primary managers of healthcare tasks in the household



Women are also more likely than men to perform responsibilities like scheduling appointments, picking up prescriptions or medical supplies, caring for sick family members, completing medical documents, and choosing primary care doctors and specialists.<sup>4</sup> While the gender disparity is less dramatic when there are no children at home, scheduling appointments remains a common household responsibility for women regardless of whether children are present or not.

1: Note: Inclusive gender identity options were given, but less than 1% of respondents identified as other than "male" or "female". Surveys were conducted on Suzy and weighted to be nationally representative based on age, gender, ethnicity, and region.

2-4: Healthgrades Women's Health Research, July 2022. Statistically significant difference.

## Women are keeping up with their children's regular health visits but not their own

When children come into the picture, women are more likely to stay on top of their kids' annual exams while overlooking their own routine check-ups. For example, within the last year:

- 94% of children had a basic health screening compared to 83% of mothers
- 81% of children received a wellness exam compared to 50% of mothers
- 76% of children went to the dentist compared to 55% of mothers
- 56% of children had an eye exam compared to 46% of mothers<sup>5</sup>

Although school-mandated wellness exams play a part in this trend, women aren't using these scheduling opportunities to address their own medical needs alongside their children's.

## Americans are skipping preventative care, with women neglecting gender-specific exams

Women are the primary managers of healthcare tasks in their families, but they tend to perform healthcare tasks for multiple household members beyond themselves. Attending to their own appointments is ripe for improvement. Specifically, in the past year:

- 54% of women visited the dentist
- 53% of women received a physical exam
- 48% of women had their eyes checked
- 31% of women had a cholesterol check<sup>6</sup>

These numbers begin to decline when it comes to gender-specific preventative screenings. For women's wellness checks in particular, the past year saw:

- 50% of women over 40 received a mammogram
- 35% of women went to a gynecological appointment
- 26% of women got a pap smear<sup>7</sup>



Overall, 55% of women skipped or delayed preventative care last year, and they were 48% more likely than men to do so, with dental exams being the most commonly postponed appointment across all age groups.<sup>8</sup>

5-7: Healthgrades Women's Health Research, July 2022.

8: Healthgrades Women's Health Research, July 2022. Statistically significant difference.

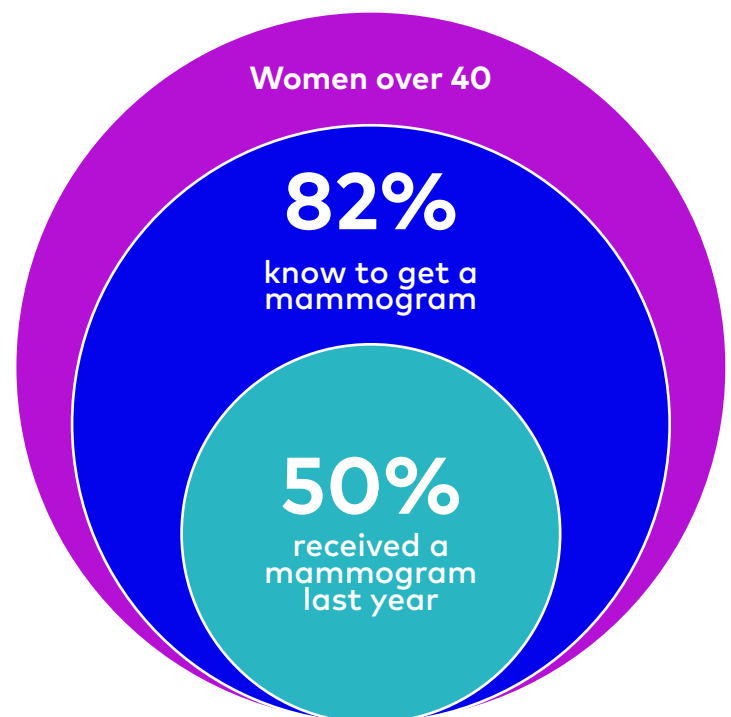
When patients postpone preventive care, they forgo appointments that could save their lives. Early detection is key to staying healthy and limiting the progression of any symptoms, especially for women of color who are historically at **higher risk** of developing chronic conditions like diabetes and cancer.

A **study** by Massachusetts General Brigham found significant pandemic-related drops in cancer screenings that have left many doctors concerned about increases in late-stage diagnoses. Between March 2019 and June 2019, more than 60,000 people had a cancer screening with nearly 3,000 receiving a cancer diagnosis. However, screenings saw a 75% decline year over year between 2019 and 2020. Just over 15,000 patients were screened and nearly 2,000 diagnosed between March 2020 and June 2020. With each month of delayed cancer treatment increasing the risk of death by **10%**, every appointment—from an annual physical exam to a quick mole check—matters.

## Awareness is high, but adherence is low

The good news is that overall, women are aware of the health screenings they should get for their age—they just need a nudge toward action. For example, 82% of women over 40 know they should be getting mammograms, but only 50% received one last year.<sup>9</sup> Additionally, 61% of women over the age of 21 know that they should get a gynecological exam, but only 37% did so in the last 12 months.<sup>10</sup>

Women know what they need to stay healthy, but adherence barriers are preventing them from scheduling an appointment. If hospital and pharma marketers can find ways to address such obstacles to care, they can encourage patients to take actionable steps toward their health.





# Obstacles to Care: Why Visiting a Doctor and Getting Treatment is a Challenge



Women of all ages know they need preventative exams and annual screenings, but appointment attendance rates are still low. Why? What's preventing women from committing to their yearly health check-ups? Our Women's Health Research study revealed that cost concerns are the leading cause of delayed or canceled appointments.

Healthcare and medication costs have been rising for the past decade, with recent inflation making it even harder to afford care. Brigham and Women's Hospital research shows that launch prices for novel brand-name medications **increased 20%** annually from 2008 to 2021. The same report found that 47% of new medicines now cost over \$150,000 when only 9% of medications were that expensive between 2008 and 2013. However, the median household income in 2021 was **\$70,784**, showing an access gap between medications on the market and affordability for the average patient.

Healthgrades found that one in three women delayed, avoided, or skipped medical care due to high out-of-pocket expenses, compared to just one in five men.<sup>11</sup> Our COVID Patient Confidence survey results also support this trend, with just under one-third of patients who have received a prescription reporting that they sometimes or often chose not to fill it due to cost concerns.<sup>12</sup> In this study, women were also more likely to do this than men (36% vs. 27%, respectively).



Between inflation, cost of living increases, and a possible recession on the horizon, many women are saving what they have and reconsidering where their dollars go. Medications and appointment co-pays often take a backseat to more immediate necessities like groceries, gas, bills, and other family needs.

Other top reasons women have delayed, avoided, or skipped care include forgetting to schedule appointments (19%), fearing bad news or doctors finding a health problem (16%), feeling that their health concern or symptom is not severe enough (16%), and inconvenient hours or availability (16%). Our COVID Patient Confidence study found that the pandemic has amplified these behaviors, noting that:<sup>13</sup>

- Among women who are visiting their doctor less often post-COVID, 37% say the change is because the pandemic got them out of the habit of scheduling regular appointments
- 26% of women feel that scheduling appointments had become more difficult compared to only 17% of men

Now that **weekly COVID cases** have reached a relative lull compared to earlier years of the pandemic, patients are feeling confident enough to return to the healthcare system and women are catching up on their neglected visits. What does our research say about their patient journey?

11,13: Healthgrades Women's Health Research, July 2022. Statistically significant difference.

12: COVID Patient Confidence Pulse Survey, October 2022, n=991. Statistically significant difference.

# How Do Women Search for Healthcare Today?



Women are intentional about choosing a doctor or specialist; even more so if they've experienced a negative interaction during an appointment. Medical gaslighting—the minimization of patient concerns and symptomatic experiences—has been reported by many women as a strong deterrent to treatment.

A 2022 study from the Journal of the American Heart Association investigating sex-based differences in chest pain evaluations among young adults found that **women were less likely** than men to be admitted to a hospital, diagnosed as an emergency, and undergo corrective procedures. Women are also twice as likely to have their symptoms of a heart condition dismissed as symptoms of **mental illness**.

Finding the right doctor and treatment plan can be frustrating when symptoms are downplayed or incorrectly diagnosed. That's why women are developing stricter personal criteria for vetting clinicians and specialists, with three specific requirements top of mind.

## 1. Physician compatibility

In our Women's Health Research study, we asked women what they consider to be the most important factor when it comes to being satisfied with their primary care doctor. Common answers included:<sup>14</sup>

- Whether the doctor listens to them (48% of women vs. 36% of men)
- Ability to trust the doctor's decisions regarding their care (44% for both women and men)
- Whether the doctor answers their questions (38% of women vs. 30% of men)

Trust, understanding, and transparency are paramount. When women know something is wrong with their health, they won't settle for a healthcare professional who doesn't take their concerns seriously or help them find answers.

Most important factors that determine satisfaction with PCP	Women	Men
Whether doctor listens to me	48%*	36%*
Ability to trust doctor's decisions in regard to my care	44%	44%
Whether doctor answers my questions	38%*	30%*
How well doctor explains my symptoms/condition	33%	39%
Time spent with doctor discussing my care	32%	29%

\*Denotes statistical significance.

14: Healthgrades Women's Health Research, July 2022. Statistically significant difference.

## 2. Shared backgrounds

Women also place a lot of importance on the gender identity and cultural background of a prospective physician. The Healthgrades BIPOC Healthcare Attitudes study showed that compared to men, women are more likely to agree that it's important for their doctor to be the same gender (27% of women vs. 19.5% of men).<sup>15</sup> Both men and women are equally likely to have doctors they trust (78% of women vs. 82% of men), but patients with doctors of the same gender are more likely to agree with that statement (83% same gender vs. 73% different gender).<sup>16</sup>

Representation in healthcare matters—women appreciate seeing a diverse staff of healthcare professionals to whom they can relate and convey their concerns.

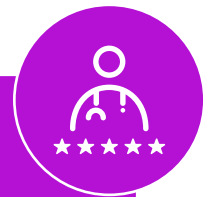
## 3. Promising reviews

Around 81% of women read reviews before scheduling an appointment, while 70% of women consider online reviews as somewhat or very important when choosing a healthcare professional.<sup>17</sup> Women want honest and transparent insight into how a doctor or specialist treats their patients and listens to their concerns.



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of women read reviews before scheduling an appointment



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of women identify reviews as somewhat or very important when choosing a healthcare professional

<sup>15</sup>: Infosurv and Healthgrades BIPOC Healthcare Attitudes Study, n=604, July 2022. Statistically significant difference unless otherwise noted.

<sup>16</sup>: Infosurv and Healthgrades BIPOC Healthcare Attitudes Study, n=604, July 2022.

<sup>17</sup>: COVID Patient Confidence Pulse Survey, October 2022, n=991.



# Four Ways Hospital and Pharma Marketers Can Better Serve Women



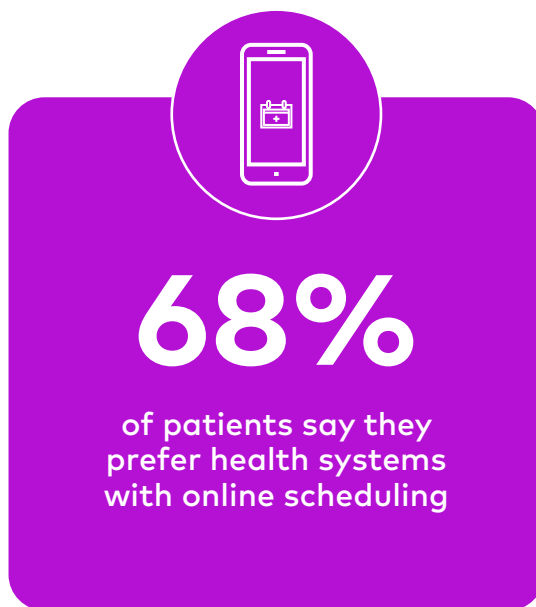
Marketers are key to connecting women with the right doctors and treatments for them. Here are four ways marketers can effectively aid women in their journey to better health.

## 1. Market to women as both caregivers and care receivers

Women are making the majority of healthcare decisions, so shift your marketing to appeal to them as caregivers and play up factors that matter to them in their healthcare search. Make **online reviews** on your site easy to find, and be sure to respond to all feedback, positive or negative. Also, consider adding **online scheduling** for access and convenience—after all, **68% of patients** say they prefer health systems with this feature. With women prioritizing their children's health, it's also worth considering the pediatrician's office as a forum for women's healthcare education. For instance, brochures about mammograms and general women's wellness exams can help reinforce the importance of these recommended screenings.

Appeal to women as care receivers by motivating them to take care of themselves and stressing the importance of preventive care in your messaging. For current patients, assist them in keeping up with important regular screenings by scheduling their next check-up appointment right after they've seen a doctor, and deploy appointment reminders through email and text message to reduce no-shows.

You can also leverage social media to keep women informed and healthcare top of mind. For major health-related holidays like Breast Cancer Awareness Month or National Women and Girls HIV/AIDS Awareness Day, have a big media push prepared to remind women to schedule their necessary appointments. Consult a **healthcare observances calendar** in advance and allot some space in your marketing calendar to these campaigns.

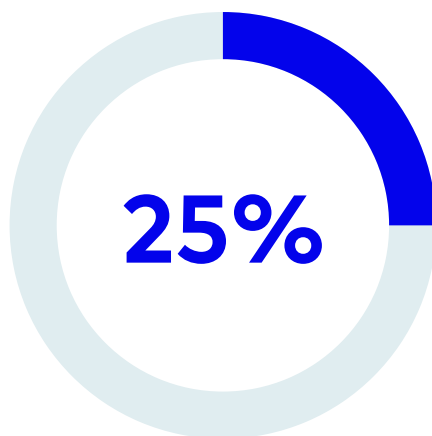


## 2. Promote diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) efforts

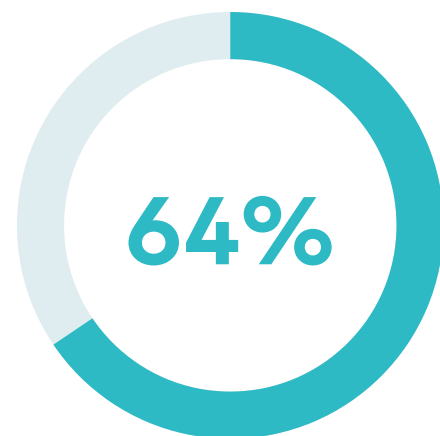
Social determinants of health contribute to **60% of healthcare outcomes**, and people of color deserve doctors and specialists who understand how race, ethnicity, gender, and culture are linked to health. Unfortunately, many people can't access the care they need. For example, BIPOC women are disproportionately impacted by inequities in care. In fact, Black women **experience lower life expectancies** and higher rates of maternal mortality versus other US women.

One factor impacting the care of women of color is the underrepresentation of BIPOC people among medical students and hospital staff. Only 25% of POC have seen a doctor of the same race/ethnicity in the last year.<sup>18</sup> Overall, 78% of BIPOC patients agree with the statement: "I have a doctor that I trust completely." Still, they're also 150% more likely than White respondents to disagree with that statement."<sup>19</sup>

### % of respondents that saw a healthcare professional of the same race or ethnicity



Respondents of color



White respondents

By incorporating DEI into **hospital** and **pharma** marketing strategies, you're telling women that they'll find a safe, inclusive, and comfortable environment when they engage with your brand. A little consideration goes a long way toward establishing trust, elevating the patient experience, and cultivating a loyal patient base for years to come. Here are some ways to make marketing more inclusive:

- Consider and address how some conditions disproportionately affect certain racial and ethnic groups
- Elevate historically underrepresented communities in editorial content
- Invest in regular DEI training for staff members
- Insist on diverse casting for all video content
- Add more people of color to hospital and pharma marketing sales teams
- Ensure all marketing materials are translated into multiple languages

Once you've taken some of these steps, shine a light on what you've done and regularly ask for feedback from patients so you can keep improving.

### 3. Demystify treatment cost information

Many women want to take care of themselves and keep up with their medications, but rising treatment costs are a major deterrent. To help combat patient discouragement, hospital **price transparency laws** now make it mandatory for health systems to provide patients with financial costs associated with all healthcare services. Pharma marketers should also follow suit and show women that high-quality care is within their reach and price range. Don't be afraid to give healthcare consumers a **peek** into your treatment or procedure cost information.

Pharma brands can also directly refer women to discount sites that allow patients to compare prescription prices and up-to-date discounts across pharmacies in their area. Drawing women's attention to discounted rates and coupons shows them that your brand is doing everything possible to help mitigate rising healthcare costs and demonstrates a commitment to making treatment accessible to all—no matter their budget.



### 4. Make it easy to connect with female doctors

People who see a doctor of the same gender are 14% more likely to report trusting their doctor.<sup>20</sup> Providing women with plenty of female healthcare professionals to choose from can encourage them to be more proactive and open about their care preferences. Health system marketers should ensure that consumers can search physicians by gender on their site or a third-party site like [healthgrades.com](https://www.healthgrades.com), and consider ways to elevate female voices in their content marketing strategy.

Maybe there's an opportunity to highlight female staff members during Women's History Month or put together a panel of female leaders in the healthcare industry to discuss critical issues in women's health. No matter the approach, prospective patients will feel reassured knowing they'll find a strong and supportive network of female doctors at your hospital.

<sup>20</sup>: Infosur and Healthgrades BIPOC Healthcare Attitudes Study, n=604, July 2022



# Aligning with Women's Health Needs to Drive Impactful Conversions

Half of all Americans who see a doctor this year will visit healthgrades.com, and 69% of our audience is made up of women.<sup>21</sup> By partnering with Healthgrades, you can engage the largest population of commercially-insured, qualified patients searching for care online when they're ready to take action.

## Solutions for Health Systems

For **health systems**, we can extend your audience reach and drive more visits than any other third-party site. Premium placement, including prominent branding and CTAs on Healthgrades physician search results pages and HCP profiles, ensures consumers see your hospital first. Our competitive intercept feature even redirects appointment opportunities from your competitors by showing alternative options from your health system on competing systems' profiles. We make it easy for women to find healthcare professionals they trust at your health system.

We can also help you promote hospital offerings that matter most to women searching for care. Since women are 26% more likely than men to feel that scheduling appointments has become more difficult lately, hospital marketers should highlight online appointment scheduling.<sup>22</sup> With Healthgrades, you can integrate online booking for in-person and telehealth services directly into your profiles to help more women easily schedule their routine screenings.

## Solutions for Life Sciences

Healthgrades' **digital pharma solutions** maximize the impact of your marketing strategy so you can engage more women seeking treatment. Our Guided Physician Search tool, integrated into our best-in-class editorial content and your brand.com, helps low-funnel consumers find specialists when treatment is top of mind. The empowering editorial content in Healthgrades PatientConnect Hubs features female patient and physician voices, giving women the information they need to take action.



**Contact us** today to learn how Healthgrades can help you connect with women and guide them to the care they need.

<sup>21</sup>: Healthgrades Site Study, 2022.  
<sup>22</sup>: COVID Patient Confidence Pulse Survey, October 2022, n=991