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WRI 2023 — Optimizing the Behavioral Health of Women Living with and Vulnerable to HIV

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Image



**WOMEN'S
RESEARCH
INITIATIVE
ON HIV/AIDS**

On April 20-23, 2023, The Women's Research Initiative on HIV/AIDS (WRI), a program of The Well Project, convened a meeting focused on *Optimizing the Behavioral Health and Overall Well-being of Women Living with and Vulnerable to HIV*. The meeting sought to promote comprehensive, holistic approaches that integrate behavioral health to address the needs and improve the overall well-being of women living with and vulnerable to HIV. ([Access the Issue Brief here](#) or below.)

Highlights from the meeting include:

The Well Project and the WRI use the term "women" to describe anyone who identifies as such across the gender spectrum.

- **The relationship between HIV and behavioral health**, specifically mental health and substance use, **is interactive and multi-layered**. Holistic care for women living with and vulnerable to HIV must meaningfully respond to and center their behavioral health needs.
- **Substance use**, which is affected by individual, social, and structural factors, **can have a profound impact on HIV acquisition and care** among women.
- Among women **living with HIV, Black women, other women of color, and women of trans experience** (trans women) **are disproportionately affected by behavioral health issues** and require specialized attention and interventions.
- **Lived experience must be valued across the HIV field as an aspect of HIV "expertise,"** on par with competencies such as clinical acumen and policy proficiency, in order to meaningfully engage women living with HIV in research, policy, and treatment.

Image



The behavioral health needs of women living with and vulnerable to HIV are significant and must be integrated into and addressed through HIV prevention and care. Challenges related to mental health and substance use can affect women's quality of life, vulnerability to HIV acquisition, treatment success, and mortality. Marginalized populations, including Black women, Latinas, and trans women, experience additional behavioral health challenges, and their unique needs must be considered in the development of behavioral health research, services, and policy. These efforts must also address the challenges posed by the systemic racism embedded in the US healthcare system. While some progress has been made, ensuring broader success requires thoughtful, coordinated efforts that center the needs of women living with and vulnerable to HIV.

To learn more, please see the WRI 2023 Issue Brief: [*Optimizing the Behavioral Health of Women Living with and Vulnerable to HIV*](#).

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WRI 2023 Meeting Participants

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University of North Carolina School of Medicine **Allison Agwu, MD, ScM**

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Division of AIDS Research, NIMH, NIH **Nancie Archin, PhD***

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Gilead Sciences **Inger Burnett-Zeigler, PhD**

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The Well Project **Cecilia Chung**

Transgender Law Center **Jenna Conley***

The Well Project **Elizabeth Connick, MD**

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Office of Infectious Disease and HIV/AIDS Policy; Office of the Assistant Secretary for Health Director
US DHHS **Jennifer Kates, PhD***

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*2023 WRI Advisory Board Member

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