



Empower Women's Health during National Women's Health Week

OKLAHOMA CITY, May 3, 2024 — National Women's Health Week, from May 12 to 18, offers us an opportunity to bring awareness to the holistic health care needs that women have.

Unfortunately, it's not a balanced picture across our nation. [Did you know that Oklahoma ranks 46th in the U.S. for women's health and well-being?](#) From my experience as an OBGYN, I witnessed firsthand how crucial early and preventive care can be, as well as the impact social determinants of health can have on a woman's ability to receive care. As we approach this important awareness week, I'm reminded of the critical need to prioritize women's health. This annual event provides an opportunity to shine a spotlight on maternal health, preventive care and mental well-being, and reminds us to reflect on how our health care community can continue to champion improved health outcomes for all women.

In communities across the state, maternal health remains a pressing concern, with significant disparities in health care access and outcomes, especially among women of color and those in under-resourced communities. [Oklahoma continues to rank high among the states with the highest rates of maternal mortality](#), with Black and American Indian/Alaska Native women [experiencing disproportionately higher maternal mortality rates](#). I have seen firsthand the urgent need for improved maternal outcomes and the importance of preventive care to address the health of women and their babies.

Working in tandem with maternal health, preventive care is paramount to long-term health. From breast cancer screenings to yearly well-woman visits, preventive care allows for early detection and intervention, yet far too many women lack access to these regular screenings, vaccinations and other life-saving services. Whether due to financial constraints, lack of information or other social determinants of health, these barriers must be broken down so that all women have access to the care they need to stay healthy.

Equally as important to address is the stigma surrounding women's mental health that persists, preventing many from seeking help and receiving adequate care. [More than one in five women experience a mental health condition](#), yet societal norms often discourage them from openly discussing their struggles or seeking professional support. Some, particularly those from under-resourced communities, face significant barriers to seeking mental health support due to fear of judgment or lack of access to affordable care. This stigma must be addressed head-on to ensure that women feel empowered to prioritize their mental well-being and seek the assistance they need without fear of judgment or shame.

Empowering women to advocate for their own health needs is essential. Women must be equipped with the knowledge and resources to make informed decisions about their care and have the ability to take control of their health, including through regular screenings. Additionally, community-based initiatives are important for raising awareness and promoting



preventive measures at the grassroots level.

National Women's Health Week is more than just a week on the calendar. I urge fellow health care leaders, providers, and advocates to join in prioritizing women's health. Let us seize this opportunity to promote a culture of wellness that values and supports the well-being of all women, regardless of their socioeconomic status. Together, we can ensure that women receive the care and support they need not just during National Women's Health Week, but every week of the year.

Sonja Hughes, MD, is CEO of Aetna Better Health of Oklahoma.

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About Aetna Medicaid

Aetna Medicaid Administrators LLC (Aetna Medicaid), a CVS Health company, has over 30 years of experience managing the care of under-resourced populations, using innovative approaches and a local presence in each market to achieve both successful health care results and effective cost outcomes. Aetna Medicaid has expertise serving high-need Medicaid members, including those who are dually eligible for Medicaid and Medicare. Currently, Aetna Medicaid owns and/or administers Medicaid managed health care plans under the names of Aetna Better Health and other affiliate names. Together, these plans serve members in 16 states, including Arizona, Florida, Illinois, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Michigan, New Jersey, New York, Ohio, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, Texas, Virginia and West Virginia. For more information, see www.aetnabetterhealth.com.

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