

# Documentary Highlights Need for Advancing Women's Health Research

WASHINGTON, D.C., UNITED STATES, December 27, 2023 / EINPresswire.com/ -- The National Institutes of Health recently presented an exclusive screening of the documentary *Below the Belt* to its 21,000+ employees and researchers. *Below the Belt* shines a light on endometriosis, a disease that affects 200 million girls and women around the world yet remains vastly underfunded and under-researched.



The filmmaker Shannon Cohn is one of those women. Cohn partnered with executive producers Hillary Rodham Clinton, Rosario Dawson, Corinne Foxx, Mae Whitman, and the late Senator Orrin Hatch to position the film as a key part of a larger social impact campaign focused on increasing widespread awareness, improving medical education, and creating transformative policy changes in women's health.

The documentary shows how women are often dismissed, discounted, and disbelieved in their healthcare. During the average ten years it takes to be diagnosed with endometriosis, they are often told that symptoms are in their head or part of being a woman. A greater diagnostic delay exists for women of color who are less likely to be believed, diagnosed, and effectively treated. Due to outdated notions, women with endometriosis are often treated with an array of ineffective drugs and surgeries and erroneously told that pregnancy and hysterectomy are cures. Nearly 50% of infertility cases in women are due to this disease, and almost all are preventable.

The NIH screening, hosted by Diana W. Bianchi, M.D., director of the Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development at NIH, and Janine Clayton, M.D., Director, Office of Research on Women's Health, and NIH Associate Director for Research on Women's Health, was shared with all 27 departments of the NIH Institutes and Centers that make up the National Institutes of Health.

"It is important for our society to understand the human impact of endometriosis. That is why

documentaries like *Below the Belt* are so significant," said Diana W. Bianchi, M.D. "Our hope is that a greater awareness of the effects of endometriosis among women in the United States and around the world will help accelerate research efforts to definitively diagnose, prevent, and treat this painful disorder."

Director Janine Clayton, M.D., noted in a panel discussion following the screening that too often, women, and in particular women of color, are not listened to, especially when they are experiencing pain, and they are not believed.

"Unfortunately, race is a factor that sometimes results in bias and how clinicians evaluate individuals presenting with pain," said Clayton. "It is critical that we raise awareness of that fact and necessary to interrupt the bias."

Both NIH and Cohn are pressing Congress about the urgent need to focus on women's health research.

"The goal is to press for a transformative amount of research funding for NIH," said Cohn. "Researchers should be allowed to be trailblazers on a disease that impacts so many people. We must compel Congress to act on the urgent need to increase funding, not just for endometriosis but for all women's health issues."

NIH is working with the White House on a new initiative establishing the first-ever White House Initiative on Women's Health Research, an effort led by First Lady Dr. Jill Biden and the White House Gender Policy Council. Its goal is to fundamentally change how the United States approaches and funds women's health research while pioneering the next generation of discoveries in women's health.

In a statement, the Biden administration specified that "under-investing in women's health research can decrease women's well-being and quality of life, hold women back in the workplace, and affect their families' economic security. By contrast, increasing investments in women's health research can yield broad societal gains, including lower health care costs and a more productive and inclusive workforce."

Cohn believes the global social impact campaign around the film can help elevate the White House's overarching mission and recently discussed the campaign's strategic elements and goals with the White House Gender Policy Council.

Learn more about endometriosis at [www.EndoWhat.com](http://www.EndoWhat.com) and the film at [www.BelowtheBelt.film](http://www.BelowtheBelt.film).

#### About *Below the Belt*

The documentary *Below the Belt* exposes widespread problems in our healthcare systems that disproportionately affect women. From societal taboos and gender bias to misinformed doctors

and financial barriers to care, the film reveals how millions are silenced and how, by fighting back, we can improve healthcare for everyone. Below the Belt is streaming on PBS through June 2024.

#### About Shannon Cohn

Shannon Cohn is an attorney and filmmaker whose work has appeared on PBS, Discovery Channel, and Nat Geo. Her previous film, *Endo What?*, a feature documentary on endometriosis, was hailed by *The Guardian* as "film of the year" and by *Newsweek* as "the first step in a plan for change."

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