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## NEWS LOCAL

# B.C. women feel health needs unmet: Study



By Eric MacKenzie

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Women are unhappier than men when it comes to having their health needs addressed. FOTOLIA

Women's health advocates are calling on policy-makers and medical professionals to take notice of a local study that found women have a greater perception that their health-care needs are not being met compared to men.

A Gender and Sexual Health Initiative study at the BC Centre for Excellence in HIV/AIDS found that 13.7% of B.C. women were unsatisfied versus just 10.1% of men, using data collected from more than 12,000 B.C. residents in the 2011-12 Canadian Community Health Survey.

"I cannot say I was surprised," said Dr. Eugenia Socias, one of the study's authors. "But I think it's a highly relevant finding from a policy perspective."

The study itself presents some potential factors, including the fact that men are more likely to hold full-time employment, and are thus more likely to have access to extended care.

But local advocates highlighted several other gender-specific barriers in accessing medical services. Taq Bhandal, a PhD student at UBC, pointed to "invisible, structural mechanisms" that limit the ability of women to access health resources. She also noted that

women may be more comfortable consulting with a female physician, but men make up the majority of family doctors.

%can see there being a power difference between physicians and women who access their care in that way,+said Bhandal.

Vancouver Women's Health Collective executive director France-Emmanuelle Joly said she believes women not only have more complex health needs, but are also more aware of what their needs are. That means they may be seeking treatment for multiple ailments simultaneously, but are limited by one-issue-per-visit policies.

%don't think that (policy) works for anybody, but I think women are more impacted than men can be,+said Joly.

Joly said the findings are important to consider in policy and funding decisions at the federal and provincial levels, but Bhandal said leaders in the health-care field should think about how the gap in perception can be closed as well.

%How are we educating the health professionals that will be attending to the needs of these women?+said Bhandal, who is also a VWHC board member. %Some of that perception is how they're being treated by health professionals themselves. So an additional action item would be revisiting curriculum.+

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