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Empowering professional women in eye health: how to get involved

Engaging with organisations that improve gender equity is a helpful first step.

The field of eye health presents numerous opportunities for collaboration toward gender equity. Many organisations are focused on promoting gender equity and enhancing women's roles in ophthalmology, health care, and leadership. This article highlights meaningful ways to get involved.

Joining local and regional organisations

In your community, you can enhance eye health activities by focusing on prioritising gender equity. Start by gathering evidence for advocacy, such as asking female colleagues about workplace barriers. Promote positive messages about female eye health workers in campaigns, and review policies and recruitment practices to ensure inclusivity and equity for all genders, while actively addressing any potential biases.

Local and regional women's organisations, such as **Women in Ophthalmology South Africa (WOSA)**, play a vital role in advocating and supporting female eye health professionals. These organisations can connect women with mentors and sponsors who can support them to navigate career challenges. Building such a network of trusted individuals is invaluable for career advice and opportunities, and for personal growth. If there is not a local organisation or society focusing on gender equity in eye health in your region, consider working with colleagues or peers to form one.

Knowledge sharing and volunteering within global organisations

Several key organisations actively promote gender equity in eye health, collaborating across regions through global consortia and workgroups. Notable examples include:

- IAPB's Gender Equity Workgroup (www.iapb.org/connect/work-groups/gender-equity/)
- Women Leaders in Eye Health (bit.ly/3E9tEzj)
- Women Ophthalmologists Worldwide (wowophthalmology.org/)

Joining these initiatives and knowledge-sharing efforts can help women in eye health to connect with like-minded individuals and build impactful relationships. These collaborations enhance personal and professional development while enhancing global advocacy for female eye care workers.

Looking beyond eye health, organisations like **Women in Global Health**, **Women Lift Health**, and **Global Health 50/50** focus on gender equity in public health and support female leaders worldwide. They also offer valuable resources and training opportunities.



A panel of eye health leaders at a United Nations Commission for the Status of Women event in 2024, New York. USA

Within the wider gender space, there are also several major organisations such as **Women for Women International**, **Global Fund for Women**, **UN Women**, **Vital Voices**, **Purposeful**, and more that advocate for gender equity across all sectors.

Global collaboration and leadership opportunities

Global organisations in ophthalmology, like the **Asia Pacific Academy of Ophthalmology (APAO)** and the **American Academy of Ophthalmology (AAO)**, offer numerous leadership opportunities. Women interested in leadership roles can actively seek involvement in committees or start new chapters, advocating for the strategic support needed by their female colleagues. Other impactful organisations to connect with and learn more about include **Women Deliver** and **Women in Ophthalmology**.

A call to action

Gender equity is not solely the responsibility of women: men who are in positions of power and influence can play a vital role in supporting women to take up leadership positions. As women in eye health, working with male allies, we can shape the future of our field. Let's step forward with confidence, engage with key organisations, and take on leadership roles.

Everyone can advocate for more data on gender disparities in eye health leadership. If your organisation is a member of the International Agency for the Prevention of Blindness (IAPB), take part in the IAPB Gender Equity Workgroup's Gender Survey. At the community level, assess existing policies and conduct surveys to identify issues affecting women in eye health. Engage key stakeholders in decision-making and collaborate on gender equity initiatives. Support best practices and policies that promote gender equity, advocate for women's leadership, and create environments where they can thrive.

We encourage everyone to reach out to organisations and initiatives that focus on the intersection of eye health and gender equity, and to get involved in events to women and the wider eye health community.