ECONOMIST ENTERPRISE

Healthy foundations: The hidden economics of women's prevention

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The opportunity no one counts

Governments, health systems, employers and families routinely bear the cost of illness. But we as a society rarely measure the value that prevention preserves. When women stay healthy, they can work longer, earn more, care for others, participate in their communities and contribute to stronger economies.

Across a lifetime, preventable ill-health can narrow women's opportunities

The vignette combines evidence-based examples to illustrate potential impacts on participation. It is not a real-life case study and should not be interpreted as representing a single person's experience.



At school

Heavy menstrual bleeding and iron deficiency

Heavy menstrual bleeding and iron deficiency leave her exhausted and struggling to concentrate. Missed school becomes missed learning, narrowing her educational opportunities and shaping the choices available to her in adulthood.[1,2]



Building a career

Migraine

Migraine leaves her managing recurring pain and other symptoms that can disrupt both work and daily life. Missed work and reduced capacity can make it harder to take on new opportunities and progress, shaping her career, earnings and financial security over time.[3]



Later in working life

Hypertension and diabetes

Hypertension and diabetes find her managing health problems that have gone undiagnosed or uncontrolled. Missed work and growing treatment demands can make it harder to remain economically active, while preventable complications can further undermine her health, earnings and financial security as she approaches retirement.[4,5]



These women are not the exception. They represent millions of women whose ill-health quietly shapes their opportunities and changes the course of their lives. What begins as one woman's lost potential becomes one of the world's greatest hidden economic opportunities—one that starts with preventing avoidable losses before they accumulate.

This infographic presents selected findings from *Healthy Foundations: The hidden economics of women's prevention*. All modelled estimates are from Economist Enterprise's economic modelling analysis, 2026, unless otherwise stated. See the accompanying report for supporting evidence, references and full methodological details.

The opportunity is far bigger than we think

Across the world, millions of women are living with conditions that could be prevented, diagnosed earlier or managed more effectively. By the time disease is detected, opportunities have already been lost—for women, families, employers and economies.

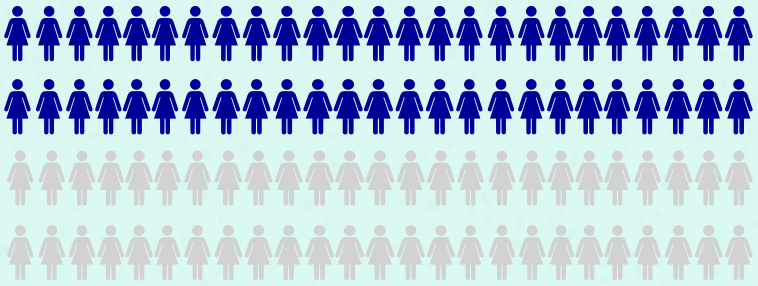
Hypertension and diabetes are among the few conditions where the economic value of prevention can already be quantified, offering the first measurable glimpse of prevention's broader potential.

From one woman to billions*

1.9bn women

Together, hypertension and diabetes affect 1.9 bn women worldwide.

*All modelled estimates presented in this infographic are from Economist Enterprise's economic modelling analysis, 2026, unless otherwise stated.



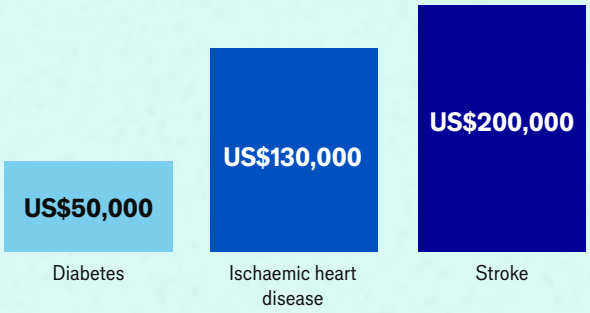
1 in 2

Nearly 1 in 2 women remain undiagnosed, delaying treatment until preventable complications emerge.

For one woman, the consequences last a lifetime

For many women, poor health does not end with illness. It can shape a woman's career, earnings, and financial security for decades.

Average lifetime earnings lost from premature retirement





Lost earnings are the only visible part of the story. Many of the wider consequences for women's lives and opportunities—including effects on work, unpaid contributions, career progression and financial security—remain hidden, and largely unmeasured.

When women lose, economies lose

Across millions of women, these individual losses add up to:

US$4.3trn

every year, more than double total EU health expenditure in 2023.[6]



*Includes deaths from hypertension-related stroke and ischaemic heart disease. The model assumes no deaths attributed directly to hypertension within the one-year period, using Economist Enterprise internal modelling scenarios used in the report *Healthy foundations: The hidden economics of women's prevention.*

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Healthier women, stronger economies.

Even small improvements in prevention could have big impacts. Just a 10% reduction in hypertension and diabetes, combined with earlier diagnosis and better disease management, could transform women's health in just one year.



The result?

580,000*

More than 580,000 fewer women would die every year—over 1,500 lives saved every day.



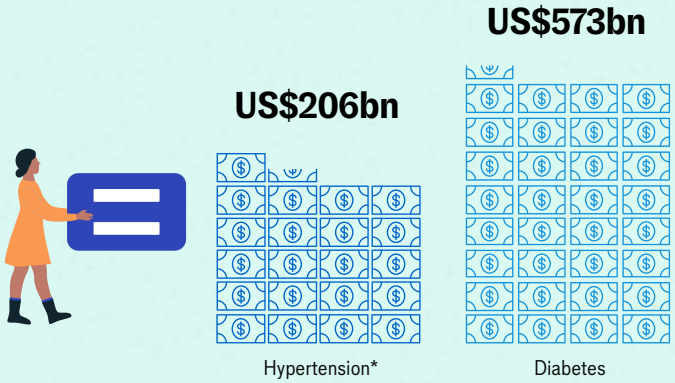
*Source: Economist Enterprise internal modelling scenarios used in the report *Healthy foundations: The hidden economics of women's prevention*. The estimate comprises approximately 230,000 fewer hypertension-related deaths and 350,000 fewer diabetes-related deaths annually.
**Includes deaths from hypertension-related stroke and ischaemic heart disease. The model assumes no deaths attributed directly to hypertension within the one-year period, using Economist Enterprise internal modelling scenarios used in the report *Healthy foundations: The hidden economics of women's prevention*.

Healthy gains are only the beginning

When fewer women become seriously ill, they require less costly treatment, miss fewer days of paid work and unpaid work, and remain healthier for longer.

US$780bn

Strengthening prevention, earlier diagnosis and better management for hypertension and diabetes alone could generate nearly US$780bn in annual economic savings worldwide–**more than US$2bn every day.**



*Includes deaths from hypertension-related stroke and ischaemic heart disease. The model assumes no deaths attributed directly to hypertension within the one-year period, using Economist Enterprise internal modelling scenarios used in the report *Healthy foundations: The hidden economics of women's prevention*.



US$780bn is the floor, not the ceiling

US$780bn is an extraordinary opportunity, but it's only a fraction of the full prevention opportunity for women's health. It only captures:

- Two chronic conditions
- One year of economic gains
- Outcomes current evidence allow us to quantify

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Most of the opportunity remains below the surface



What extends beyond today's evidence*

- Migraine
- Endometriosis
- Menopause
- Thyroid disease
- Fibroids
- Polycystic ovary syndrome
- Chronic pain
- Dementia
- Autoimmune diseases
- Maternal conditions
- ...and many more

Economic value that remains hidden

- Lifetime earnings
- Career progression
- Financial security
- Unpaid care
- Education
- Earlier diagnosis
- Better long-term disease control
- Health across the life course

*Example of conditions where the full economic value of prevention, earlier diagnosis and better management has not yet been comprehensively quantified.

The biggest opportunity may be the one we can't measure yet.



If preventing and managing just two chronic conditions could generate nearly US$780bn every year, the opportunity across women's health is likely to be measured in the trillions, or even more. Much of prevention's value remains beyond what today's evidence can reveal. But what we cannot yet measure should not stop us acting now on what we already know.

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What stronger prevention can protect.

Imagine those three women again. This time, earlier action protects the opportunities that poor health might otherwise take away.



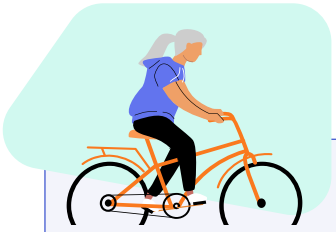
At school

She stays in school, keeps learning and builds the foundations for greater opportunities in life.



Building a career

She progresses at work, increases her earnings and financial security, and provides care for those who depend on her.



Later in working life

She stays healthier and economically active, protecting her earnings and financial security as she approaches retirement.

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