The American Association for Dental Research (AADR) appreciates the opportunity to provide input on the trans-NIH Strategic Plan for Women’s Health Research. We commend the Office of Research on Women’s Health (ORWH) for putting forth the important cross-cutting themes in the Request for Information and believe they are an imperative step in ensuring that women’s health research is conducted and supported across NIH Institutes and Centers.

As such, we would note that the proposed themes and goals can and should be readily applied to oral and craniofacial health and disease research supported by NIH and specifically, the National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research. In addition to the manifestations of sex-based differences in dental, oral and craniofacial diseases and conditions, which may be affected by hormonal changes, genetic variations and more, contextual factors and life experiences also play an important role in oral health – an integral component of overall health.

Additionally, as ORWH deliberates its approach to the science of women’s health, we would encourage ORWH to consider that, while the biologic implications of sex are both justified and important in basic or translational disease models, there is also opportunity for clinical investigators – particularly in the multi-dimensional approach to the science of women’s health – to highlight the socioeconomic and behavioral aspects of gender as well as biological sex. As noted by Ioannidou¹, “economic inequality and hardship for women have resulted in limited access to oral care. As a result, gender emerged as a complex socioeconomic and behavioral factor in influencing oral health and outcomes.” Expanding the strategic plan to encompass gender may lead to a greater understanding of the life-course and psychosocial dimensions sought after by ORWH as well as equip our system for better care by considering health disparities, gender bias and therapeutic interventions.