

Gender Equality Plan

Inclusion and diversity at Netherlands Heart Institute

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1. Introduction

Netherlands Heart Institute (NLHI) is a unique cooperation of the cardiology departments of all university hospitals in the Netherlands. The mission of the NLHI is to develop new, excellent strategies for prevention, diagnosis and cure of cardiovascular disease by promoting cooperation between the cardiology departments of all university hospitals in the Netherlands.

The mission of the NLHI is translated into two overarching goals and corresponding strategies. These are: 1) Realize excellent, innovative cardiovascular research by optimizing cooperation between the academic cardiology departments and basic research groups that together build research programs from bench to bedside and improve patient care (implementation). 2) Coach talented cardiovascular researchers to the top. To complete our goals, NLHI has recognized the importance of patient participation in scientific research.

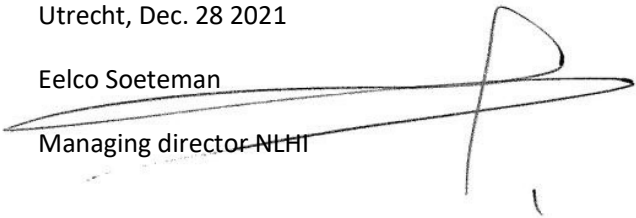
In order to support and maximize cooperation, we need to actively invite people from all backgrounds in, and give them a safe environment to show their perspective and share their experience. This requires a long-term commitment and involvement of everyone in the organization.

This Gender Equality Plan represents the current state of our collective efforts to accomplish this. Over the next years, we will commit not only to the contents of this plan, but also to make a continuous effort to update it and broaden our approaches to inclusion towards different communities. Because we are recognizing that combining perspectives gives us the best starting point for excellent research, done by healthy employees who are performing at their best. We believe this is the most important condition to reach our goals.

Utrecht, Dec. 28 2021

Eelco Soeteman

Managing director NLHI

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a large, stylized 'E' and 'S' that overlap significantly, with a horizontal line extending to the right.

2. Securing Diversity and Inclusion in the organization

2.1. Policy

The NLHI aims for equal representation in light of diversity and inclusion. As NLHI is a cooperation of the Dutch academic cardiology departments, NLHI carefully follows national and local academic initiatives. Also, NLHI complies to the policies of grant suppliers regarding diversity in the broadest sense.

The NLHI takes diversity and equality into account when installing boards, committees, jury's and the like, but also when opening calls and judging proposals. This principle is part of our house rules that are added to the appointments and labor conditions of new personnel.

In recognition of the diversity we want to see in the research community, the default language within NLHI and its communications is English, as this is actively inclusive towards international researchers working within NLHI.

2.1.1. Diversity and inclusion portfolio

Diversity and inclusion (D&I) is within the portfolio of the Management team, including the HR officer, managing director and managing board. The NLHI talent program Young @ Heart plays an important role in making our D&I principles tangible. And more important in developing our guidelines as we feel our young members should be in the lead as this concerns their future.

The D&I portfolio includes:

- Advising the management board on the (D&I) agenda;
- Advising the management board, strategic research themes, project leaders on specific, stimulating D&I activities within the organization, and pointing out any expressions or activities that do not align with NLHI's vision on diversity and inclusion;

3. Training and raising awareness

NLHI, as a cooperation of the Dutch academic cardiology departments, carefully follows national and local academic initiatives. Researchers employed by NLHI are part of local research groups, departments and divisions. As such, NLHI employees participate in local (D&I) training programs. For example the 'bias awareness training' in UMC Utrecht.

This ensures high efficiency and foremost high accessibility and relevance for our employees. Participating in local D&I courses stimulates NLHI employees to join their daily colleagues.

3.2.1. Leadership

As part of NLHI's efforts to create a better working environment and prepare future leaders in the cardiovascular field, the Dutch CardioVascular Alliance (DCVA) Leadership program has been set up.

This is a training program for future leaders to help them develop their skills to manage their teams and create a healthy working environment. Diversity and Inclusion is an integral subject of the modules of the Program.

NLHI has delegated the initiation of a dialogue to its talent program Young @ Heart as NLHI feels our young members should be in the lead as it concerns their future.

4. Career development and equal opportunities

4.1. Recruitment and appointment

NLHI, as a cooperation of the Dutch academic cardiology departments, carefully follows national and local academic initiatives. Procedures include explicit instructions to consider (gender) diversity at each level, from the initial proposal of a candidate to the considerations for selection and appointment committees. Committees are instructed to explicitly take into consideration D&I.

In case NLHI makes use of recruitment agencies, instructions to the agencies always include the explicit request to look for female and culturally diverse candidates.

4.2. Talent development

NLHI, as a cooperation of the Dutch academic cardiology departments, carefully follows national and local academic initiatives. NLHI employees take part in local Research Career Development Programs.

NLHI initiated the cardiovascular talent program Young @ Heart. The program aims to help researchers grow in their research career, strengthen the impact of their work, improve their teamwork and leadership skills, create an international network for NLHI researchers and create a community for young researchers.

Positions for the board of Young @ Heart are limited. The nomination process is open. Selection of candidates is the responsibility of the Young @ Heart board and subject to D&I principles.

In recognition of the diversity we want to see in the research community, the default language for the program is English, as this is actively inclusive towards international researchers working within the cardiovascular community.

4.3. Monitoring

NLHI monitors the ratio men/ women since 2010. Over the years the ratio tends to be more and more biased towards women.

Sex	Percentage
Men	43,3%
Women	56,7%

Figure 6: Ratio of men and women appointed by the NLHI in 2021

The ethnic diversity is not monitored, but we know from experience that a substantial part of NLHI employees have an international background.

5. Diversity in research and teaching content

5.2. Diversity in research content

Cardiovascular (bio)medical research is a field where attention for diversity is of the utmost importance, as differences in sex or gender, ethnicity and socio-economic status can have very real impacts on health outcomes and treatments. Women's heart problems are known to be different from men's, migrant populations have been harder hit than most by the COVID pandemic, which in turn has been found to have cardiovascular consequences, and ethnic minorities and people of mixed ethnic backgrounds in particular are less likely to be able to find a genetic match for heart and lung donations.

For some of these issues, the awareness is becoming more established. NLHI's project leaders like Professor Hester den Ruijter and Dr. Yolande Appelman are internationally well regarded for their research on heart disease in women and have made the subject of sex and gender differences in cardiovascular disease a focus point in cardiovascular research.

6. Work-life balance

Part of NLHI's long-term strategy is fostering a healthy, sustainable work environment.

Counselors are available through a central program for employees who need support in (re)gaining balance in their work, or in reintegrating after illness.

Since 2021 working from home has become allowed when possible. Those employees who can work from home can do so permanently for up to 40% of their hours, allowing for more flexibility in balancing work and private life.

7. Social safety

NLHI values a safe working environment for all our employees. A behavioral code is in place for all employees, defining both what is and what is not acceptable behavior. The behavioral code bans things like sexual harassment, aggression and violence, bullying and discrimination, and encourages employees to support each other in addressing these behaviors if they do occur.

For employees experiencing an unsafe working environment, and who do not feel safe to address these issues with their management, confidential counselling is available. This way anonymous complaints can be made and confidential support is readily available to all employees to come to a suitable solution.

8. Future plans

NLHI recognizes that diversity and inclusion is an ongoing topic that requires constant attention and improvement to make sure we not only provide a safe and welcoming environment to all our current employees, but open our doors to new students, researchers and employees of all backgrounds. Thus, the current Gender Equality Plan is intended to be a living document, which will grow with our ambitions to focus on gender equality and inclusion of all.