



September 2014

The American Association of University Women supports the right of every woman to access safe, accessible, affordable, and comprehensive family planning and reproductive health care services. AAUW members have made the protection of reproductive rights a policy priority since 1977.

The lack of comprehensive support for reproductive health care has resulted in poor outcomes for many American women. Numerous schools provide abstinence-only sex education and contraception remains out of reach for many. For example, half of all pregnancies in the United States are unintended, with 4 in 10 of those pregnancies resulting in abortion.¹ Additionally, although teen birth rates have declined in recent years, nearly 7 percent of 15–19-year-olds become pregnant each year.²

The Supreme Court's 1973 ruling in *Roe v. Wade* legalized abortion and declared it a constitutionally protected right. Unfortunately, many American women are denied control over their reproductive lives due to increasing restrictions advanced by anti-choice lawmakers.

Developments in Women's Health

- The Affordable Care Act required that insurance companies cover contraception without co-pay or cost-sharing.³ However, this coverage was significantly weakened by the Supreme Court's June 2014 *Burwell v. Hobby Lobby* decision, which found that "closely held" corporations cannot be required to provide contraceptive coverage for their employees. The full impact of this decision won't be known for some time. Although Hobby Lobby challenged four forms of contraception, the court's decision was *not* limited to those forms of contraception only. Thus, companies can refuse to cover ALL forms of birth control if

they choose to do so. Several companies have already stepped forward to say they will revise their contraceptive coverage because of the court's ruling.⁴

- Beginning in 2013, brand-name emergency contraception (EC) was available over-the-counter for women and men of all ages. Generic EC will soon be available for purchase without prescription, although concerns about affordability linger.⁵
- In 2009, President Barack Obama overturned the global gag rule, also known as the Mexico City policy, and reinstated the United States' contributions to the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). This change will allow millions of women to access critical reproductive health care.
- Also in 2009, the Obama administration proposed rescinding a "conscience clause" regulation that severely limited women's access to reproductive health and family planning services, including some common forms of birth control.⁶ However, this rescission has not been finalized.

Attacks on Reproductive Rights

- **Affordable Care Act Restrictions.** The law requires insurance companies providing abortion coverage to collect two payments from each enrollee: one for the portion of the premium covering abortion care, and one for the remainder of the premium. Additionally, members of Congress have

targeted many of the Act's tax provisions to limit women's access to abortion coverage.

- **Constant Legislative Attacks.** Members of Congress have attempted to roll back reproductive rights. One example is mandating parental consent for minors receiving reproductive health services.
- **Personhood Initiatives.** Anti-choice activists have attempted to elevate the status of a fetus under federal law, undermining women's right to choose. Personhood initiatives will be on several state ballots in 2014.
- **Court Challenges.** Anti-choice advocates are actively seeking cases to send to the Supreme Court to weaken *Roe v. Wade*.

Opportunities to Improve Reproductive Health

There are several policies that Congress could enact to improve women's health and reproductive rights:

- **Improve Public Funding for Reproductive Health.** Increased Title X funding will improve women's access to basic health care and reproductive health care services.
- **Invest in Medically-Accurate, Age-Appropriate Comprehensive Sex**

Education. Programs must include information about both abstinence and the full range of contraception.

- **Support International Family Planning.** Federal funding for comprehensive international family planning programs benefit millions of women worldwide.
- **Ensure Access to Contraception and Emergency Contraception.** In many states, pharmacists can refuse to fill contraception prescriptions if they have a religious or moral objection.⁷

Additional Resources

Fact Sheets.

The Guttmacher Institute
www.guttmacher.org/sections/by-type.php?type=sheets

Women and the Affordable Care Act.

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
www.healthcare.gov/law/information-for-you/women.html

State Profiles.

Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States
www.siecus.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=Page.ViewPage&PageID=1369

AAUW advances equity for women and girls through advocacy, education, philanthropy, and research. Since 1881, AAUW has been one of the nation's leading voices promoting education and equity for women and girls. AAUW has a nationwide network of more than 170,000 members and supporters across the United States, as well as 1,000 local branches and 800 college and university partners.

¹ The Guttmacher Institute. (December 2013). *Facts on Unintended Pregnancy in the United States*. Retrieved January 23, 2014, from www.guttmacher.org/pubs/FB-Unintended-Pregnancy-US.html

³ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (August 1, 2011). *Affordable Care Act Ensures Women Receive Preventive Services at No Additional Cost*. Retrieved August 15, 2011, from www.hhs.gov/news/press/2011pres/08/20110801b.html

⁴ *The Daily Beast*. (June 30, 2014). *After Hobby Lobby, These 82 Corporations Could Drop Birth Control Coverage*. Retrieved August 13, 2014, from www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2014/06/30/after-hobby-lobby-these-77-corporations-will-drop-birth-control-coverage.html?utm_medium=email&utm_source=newsletter&utm_campaign=cheatsheet_morning&cid=newsletter_email;cheatsheet_morning&utm_term=Cheat

⁵ *The Hill*. (August 1, 2014). *Despite victories, obstacles to emergency contraception still exist*. Retrieved August 13, 2014, from <http://thehill.com/blogs/congress-blog/healthcare/214070-despite-victories-obstacles-to-emergency-contraception-still>

⁶ *The Federal Register*. (2009). *Department of Health and Human Services: Rescission of the Regulation Entitled "Ensuring that Department of Health and Human Services Funds Do Not Support Coercive or Discriminatory Policies or Practices in Violation of Federal Law"; Proposal*. Retrieved February 7, 2011, from edocket.access.gpo.gov/2009/pdf/E9-5067.pdf

⁷ National Women's Law Center. (April 24, 2012). *Pharmacy Refusals: State Laws, Regulations, and Policies*. Retrieved December 27, 2012, from www.nwlc.org/resource/pharmacy-refusals-state-laws-regulations-and-policies