

*The American Association of University Women (AAUW) supports choice in the determination of one's reproductive life and increased access to health care and family planning services.*

AAUW trusts that every woman has the ability to make her own informed choices regarding her reproductive life within the dictates of her own moral and religious beliefs. Further, AAUW believes that these deeply personal decisions should be made without government interference. AAUW members have made the protection of reproductive rights a policy principle since 1977. Family planning fosters self-sufficiency, promotes preventive health care, and educates people on ways to protect themselves and their families from the spread of sexually transmitted infections (STIs).

The U.S. Supreme Court's 1973 ruling in *Roe v. Wade* legalized abortion for all women and found abortion to be a constitutionally protected, fundamental right. Unfortunately, lawmakers have limited vulnerable women's fundamental power to control their own reproductive lives. For example, this has come in the form of legislation like the Hyde and Helms Amendments, blocking federal funding from family planning services in domestic and international realms. Serious limitations remain for those who need to access the full range of health services.

The lack of comprehensive support for reproductive health has resulted in dire outcomes. With many schools exclusively providing abstinence-only sex education and contraceptive care historically expensive to access, Americans' reproductive health has suffered. For instance, half of all pregnancies in the United States are unintended, and the United States continues to have one of the highest rates of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) in the industrialized world.

### Attacks on Reproductive Rights

Reproductive rights have been under attack for decades—even before *Roe v. Wade*—and advocates are facing grave challenges and attacks both at the federal and state levels.

**States continue to advance anti-abortion legislation.** In the last four years, states have enacted a total of 288 abortion restrictions, and more than half of U.S. women of reproductive age currently live in states that are hostile or extremely hostile to abortion rights. But the Supreme Court recently affirmed in *Whole Women's Health v. Hellerstedt* that where state restrictions on abortion care infringe on women's access to these services—for example in the form of requiring hospital-grade standards or admitting privileges—those restrictions are against the law.

**The Supreme Court allows limits on contraceptive coverage.** Unfortunately, two recent Supreme Court rulings have also created roadblocks in women's access to contraception. *Burwell v. Hobby Lobby* allowed closely held corporations to deny contraceptive coverage on the grounds of religious freedom, while *Zubik v. Burwell* resulted in ambiguity over contraceptive coverage in religious nonprofit organizations. The *Hobby Lobby* decision is a misunderstanding of the role employers should play in private, medical decisions women make every day. AAUW supports efforts asking Congress to fix this decision through legislation.

**Federal lawmakers propose and advance attacks on women's health care.** Federal lawmakers continue to attempt to restrict access to abortion care under federal law, including introducing AAUW-opposed legislation that would end access to abortion after 20 weeks. This is an unconstitutional attack that diminishes the important role that doctors play in helping women make decisions about their reproductive health.

In addition, in the past the Global Gag Rule, also known as the Mexico City Policy, has limited women's access to care globally. This executive action prohibits organizations using international family planning funds

from providing abortion-related services, even with their private money. AAUW supported its rescission in 2009 and opposes its reinstatement moving forward.

**Failed abstinence-only sex education continues.** The United States continues to have a relatively high rate of teen pregnancy and STIs. This shows a dire need for comprehensive sex education in schools. Unfortunately, medically inaccurate and misleading sex education programs are still prevalent in many states across the country, and there remains some federal support for the programs' continuation. AAUW supports comprehensive sex education that includes information on things like healthy relationships, abstinence, and contraception.

**Lawmakers propose cuts to Planned Parenthood.** Planned Parenthood provides affordable, critically needed, and quality preventive health care to 2.7 million women and men across the country. The health centers provide routine checkups, cancer screenings, contraceptive services, and HIV and STI testing. And for many low-income women and women of color, Planned Parenthood is their main health care provider. During the 114th Congress, lawmakers attempted to remove or limit federal funding for the health care provider. AAUW opposes attacks on Planned Parenthood's federal funding sources.

**Opportunities to Improve Reproductive Health**  
Though we face many potential threats to reproductive rights, AAUW will continue to pursue opportunities to improve access to care by working with Congress and the relevant federal agencies on the following initiatives.

**Improve public funding for reproductive health.** Congress continues to cut federal funding for Title X, funds that are critical in providing reproductive services to low-income women. The threat of cuts remains despite the fact that for every government dollar spent on contraceptive services, an average of \$7.09 is saved in Medicaid costs for newborn and pregnancy-related care. AAUW opposes any attempt to limit access to Title X programs and supports increasing Title X funding.

**Put prevention first.** The law of the land is currently the Affordable Care Act (ACA), which has made a positive impact on women's health. Unintended pregnancies have dropped from 51 percent to 45 percent, the first decline in decades. This is due in part to the increase in contraceptive coverage

provided by the ACA. We must uphold effective health care laws that empower women to make their own positive health care decisions.

In addition, AAUW supports a comprehensive legislative package of preventive health and education measures designed to help reduce unintended pregnancy and to support reproductive health. These proposals would ensure that all women have access to comprehensive family planning and reproductive health services. AAUW also supports proposals—like the Women's Health Protection Act—that improve access to abortion care. AAUW will continue to advocate for bills like this that tear down restrictions to reproductive rights.

**Ensure access to legally prescribed or available contraception.** Reports of pharmacist refusals to fill prescriptions for emergency contraception and all forms of birth control continue. Currently, six states permit pharmacist refusals without critical protections for patients, such as requirements to refer or transfer prescriptions. AAUW believes pharmacies should be required to fill women's prescriptions for contraception as well as sell legal emergency contraception.

AAUW believes that access to complete reproductive health services enhances women's reproductive choices, which leads to improvements in women's health care in the United States and around the world. Strong opponents of contraception and choice continue to encroach upon women's access to reproductive health services. We will continue to ensure that government policies respect and respond to the needs and priorities of a diverse range of individuals, families, and communities, especially those who face barriers to access. We will also work to ensure that appointees, nominees, and elected officials uphold our nation's laws, affirm protections for individuals, and work to improve overall health and well-being in the United States and around the world. AAUW's advocacy of a woman's right to safe, accessible, and comprehensive reproductive health care will stand at the forefront of our efforts to gain equity and justice for all women.

### **Additional Resources**

“Laws Affecting Reproductive Health and Rights:  
2015 State Policy Review”  
Guttmacher Institute  
[www.guttmacher.org/laws-affecting-reproductive-health-and-rights-2015-state-policy-review](http://www.guttmacher.org/laws-affecting-reproductive-health-and-rights-2015-state-policy-review)

“The Facts on Birth Control Coverage for Women”  
Planned Parenthood  
[www.plannedparenthoodaction.org/issues/birth-control/facts-birth-control-coverage-women](http://www.plannedparenthoodaction.org/issues/birth-control/facts-birth-control-coverage-women)

*You provide the voice; we'll provide the megaphone. Sign up to take action for women and girls today:  
[bit.ly/AAUWActionNetwork](http://bit.ly/AAUWActionNetwork).*