

AAUW supports choice in determining one's reproductive life and increased access to health care and family planning services.

AAUW trusts that everyone can make their own informed choices about their reproductive lives within the dictates of their own moral and religious beliefs. Further, we believe that these deeply personal decisions should be made without government interference.

Family planning fosters self-sufficiency, promotes preventive health care, and teaches people how to prevent the spread of sexually transmitted infections (STIs). With many schools exclusively providing abstinence-only sex education and contraceptive care historically expensive to access, however, Americans' reproductive health has suffered. For instance, [half of all pregnancies in the United States are unintended](#), and the U.S. continues to have one of the [highest rates of sexually transmitted infections \(STIs\)](#) in the industrialized world.

Access to family planning and a full range of reproductive health services enhances an individual's reproductive choices—which leads to improvements in women's health care and economic security. The ability to control when to start a family has been linked to [significant increases](#) in women's wages and [increased likelihood](#) of educational attainment. Unfortunately, lawmakers have severely limited peoples' fundamental power to control their own reproductive lives.

AAUW in Action

All of our public policy actions take direction from the [AAUW's official Public Policy Priorities](#), which are voted on by members every two years. AAUW is a nonpartisan organization—but nonpartisan does not mean “non-political.” Since its first meeting in 1881, AAUW has been a catalyst for change. Together, through our coordinated and strategic advocacy, we've enacted invaluable legislation at the federal, state and local levels. AAUW members have made the protection of reproductive rights an unwavering policy principle since 1977, including in the 2021-2023 Public Policy Priorities.

The public policy team engages in many efforts on this key issue, including but not limited to:

- Working in coalition with other gender equity and reproductive rights organizations, including [Bans Off Our Bodies](#) and the [Act for Abortion Access](#) campaigns.
- Mobilizing AAUW advocates and members through targeted calls to action on important legislation, like the [Women's Health Protection Act](#).
- Engaging directly with elected leaders and the public through calls, letters to political offices, comments and testimony in hearings, and [statements on unfolding events](#).
- Providing voter education resources on key equity issues to consider during elections and offering information on how elected officials have voted in the past (more about this and Get Out the Vote guides at the [AAUW Action Fund](#)).

Attacks on Reproductive Rights

The U.S. Supreme Court's 1973 ruling in *Roe v. Wade* established abortion as a constitutionally protected right. However, the promise of *Roe* has never been a reality for all, and reproductive rights have been under attack ever since.

On June 24, 2022, the Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade* in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization*.

AAUW [strongly condemns](#) the Supreme Court's decision, which upheld Mississippi's 15-week abortion ban and reversed nearly 50 years of precedent. Abortion access is vital to women's ability to control their lives, bodies and futures. The Court's decision harms everyone, and especially low-income people, women of color, immigrants, people with disabilities and LGBTQ+ people, as these groups already face substantial barriers to accessing reproductive services and health care.

Over the last decade, the Supreme Court has also created roadblocks to contraception access, allowing certain corporations to deny birth control coverage on the grounds of religious freedom ([Burwell v. Hobby Lobby](#)) and creating ambiguity over contraceptive coverage in religious nonprofit organizations ([Zubik v. Burwell](#)).

Without the protections provided by *Roe*, the wave of anti-abortion legislation continues in state legislatures.

In the first half of 2022 alone, [43 abortion restrictions](#) were enacted in 12 states. Abortion rights are protected under only [11 states' constitutions](#), while legislatures in Tennessee, Alabama, West Virginia and Louisiana have passed explicitly [anti-abortion amendments](#) to their own.

Overall, 26 states have banned or are likely to ban abortion—impacting the 36 million women of reproductive age living in those states. Low-income women, women of color, and women with disabilities will be especially harmed as they are [disproportionately likely](#) to live in those states, and already face substantial barriers to accessing reproductive services and health care.

Many states have also moved to restrict access to medication abortion, which [accounts](#) for more than half of abortions in the U.S. As of July 2022, 28 state legislatures had [introduced](#) bans or restrictions on medication abortion. Though telemedicine has become increasingly important during the COVID-pandemic, 19 states [prohibit](#) the use of telehealth services to provide medication abortion, and 8 other states are now attempting to do so. Further, the mailing of abortion pills is already [banned](#) in Arizona, Arkansas, and Texas, with several other states introducing bans in 2022.

Find out where your state stands and [track pending legislation here](#).

Federal law continues to restrict funding for reproductive health care—in the United States and abroad. The 1976 Hyde Amendment is a legislative provision barring the use of federal funds to pay for abortion, except in cases of rape, incest or as a lifesaving measure. The 1973 Helms Amendment applies to foreign aid, barring federal funds from being distributed to organizations that provide abortion care. In addition, the Global Gag Rule—an executive order that changes with each administration (also known as the Mexico City Policy)—has limited access to abortion care globally. This executive action prohibits organizations using international family planning funds from providing abortion-related services, even with their private money.

Efforts to permanently restrict federal funds for abortion care and create burdensome regulations for medical insurers to cover abortion services will ultimately mean people who can get pregnant lose access to the care they need. AAUW supports removing all barriers to abortion access.

Opportunities to Improve Reproductive Health

Take action to fight for reproductive freedom in the states.

- Learn more about the status of abortion in your state with the Guttmacher Institute's [policy analysis](#) and [state legislation tracker](#).
- Take opportunities to meet with your representatives on your home turf and hold in-district meetings to share your thoughts when Congress is in recess.
- [Read more](#) about what you can do, including contacting your elected officials, writing a letter to the editor, and engaging in community forums.
- Engage with the [Bans Off Our Bodies](#) coalition efforts and check for events near you!

AAUW will keep fighting to protect reproductive rights—a vital component of gender equity—and improve access to care by working with Congress and federal agencies to take the following actions.

Pass federal legislation like the Women's Health Protection Act (H.R. 3755/S. 1975). In the absence of *Roe*, federal protections for abortion and reproductive care are essential. The Women's Health Protection Act (WHPA) would finally codify the rights of pregnant people to access, and health care professionals to provide, abortion care.

Improve public funding for reproductive health. Congress must support legislation that expands funding for reproductive services for low-income individuals. The Hyde and Helms Amendments continue to block federal funding from family planning services in domestic and international realms, limiting peoples' fundamental power to control their own reproductive lives.

Put prevention first. The Affordable Care Act (ACA), which has made a positive impact on reproductive health, is currently the law of the land. When unintended pregnancies dropped for the first time in decades in 2011, that reduction was due in part to improved contraceptive coverage under the ACA. We must uphold effective health care laws that empower individuals 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 people have access to comprehensive family planning and reproductive health services.

Ensure access to legally prescribed or available contraception. Currently, [six states](#) permit pharmacists to refuse to fill prescriptions for emergency contraception and all forms of birth control without giving critical protections for patients, such as requiring pharmacies to transfer prescriptions or provide referrals. AAUW believes pharmacies should be required to fill all prescriptions for contraception and sell legal emergency contraception.

AAUW's advocacy for the right to safe, accessible and comprehensive reproductive health care is critical to achieving equity and justice for all. We must ensure that government policies reflect and address 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 affirm protections for individuals and work to improve overall health and well-being in the United States and around the world.

Additional Resources

[Take Action: Rallying for Reproductive Rights](#)

American Association of University Women (AAUW)

[AAUW Statement Strongly Condemning the U.S. Supreme Court's Opinion in Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization](#)

American Association of University Women (AAUW)

[Sexual & Reproductive Health State Legislation Tracker](#)

The Guttmacher Institute