

### Women's Health Act 2005

The Women's Health and Education Act of 2005 promotes women's health by advancing access to family planning services, education and information. The goal of this Act is to facilitate health care access and information for the prevention of unintended pregnancies, abortion and sexually transmitted diseases, all of which have reached epidemic proportions in our country and in Wisconsin.

#### **The Act Promotes Access to Women's Health Care**

- The Act promotes access to women's health care in three ways:
  1. It requires that emergency rooms provide rape victims seeking medical assistance with information about the availability of emergency contraception, so that pregnancy from the assault can be prevented. If requested by the victim, emergency contraception must be dispensed;
  2. It requires that school districts that choose to teach a sex education curriculum include comprehensive, medically-accurate information on contraceptive usage to prevent pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases. In addition, it requires schools that do teach abstinence-only curriculum to send notice home to parents that their student will not receive any instruction in disease and pregnancy prevention other than abstinence;
  3. It codifies a pharmacist's duty to dispense all federal FDA-approved contraceptives, unless contraindicated for a particular patient.

#### **Rape Victims Deserve Comprehensive Medical Care**

- Each year, approximately 300,000 women are victims of sexual assault. Approximately 25,000 of these women will become pregnant as a result, with 16,000 of these pregnancies ending in abortion. About 22,000 of these pregnancies could have been prevented if all of these victims had taken emergency contraception, a high dosage of birth control pills that prevents pregnancy if taken within 120 hours after a sexual assault.
- Information about pregnancy prevention is often denied to rape victims. Numerous studies of Wisconsin medical providers show startling statistics:
  - Less than one-half Wisconsin emergency rooms responded that they routinely prescribe emergency contraception.
  - In 21 Wisconsin counties, there are no hospitals that will prescribe emergency contraception for sexual assault victims. This translates into more than 350,000 women of reproductive age who are unable to access emergency contraception near their homes, even if they are raped.
  - A 1999 survey of 35 Wisconsin Catholic hospital emergency rooms found that 28 refused to provide EC to victims of sexual assault. (Catholics for Free Choice, 1999). Catholic hospitals in Wisconsin see almost half of all emergency visits—approximately 41%.

## Fact Sheet

- The American Medical Association has determined that standard of care procedures require hospitals to tell rape victims about the availability of emergency contraception, and dispense it if requested.

### **Responsible Sexuality Education Helps Prevent Unintended Pregnancies and Sexually Transmitted Diseases**

- Unintended pregnancy and sexually transmitted disease rates among adolescents have reached epidemic proportions.
  - Almost 50% of new sexually transmitted infections are being contracted by young people between the ages of 15-44. Life-time treatment of these cases could reach \$6.5 billion. (Alan Guttmacher Institute and University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill School of Journalism).
  - Although the rate of teenage pregnancy in the United States has been declining, it remains the highest in the developed world. One million American teenagers become pregnant each year and the majority of these pregnancies — 78 percent — are unintended.
  - Over 12,000 Wisconsin teens become pregnant every year, with Milwaukee having the second highest teen birth rate and highest African American teen birth rate in the country.
  - Wisconsin has the 14<sup>th</sup> highest rates of Chlamydia and the 21<sup>st</sup> highest rate of syphilis in the nation.
- As set forth in a 2001 report by the National Campaign to Prevent Teen pregnancy, sexuality and HIV education programs that discuss both abstinence and contraception:
  - delay sex and reduce the frequency of sex;
  - increase contraceptive use;
  - do not hasten the onset of sexual intercourse;
  - do not increase the frequency of sexual intercourse or the number of sexual partners

If a school district chooses to provide abstinence only programs for students, parents have a right to know that their child will not have access to the full range of information regarding disease and pregnancy prevention.

### **By Promoting Access to Birth Control, This Act Reduces the Incidence of Unintended Pregnancies**

- Access to birth control helps prevent unintended pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases and abortion.
  - In any given year, 85 of 100 sexually active women not using a contraceptive become pregnant. By contrast, among women taking birth control pills, only eight of 100 become pregnant. (See AGI, "U.S. Policy Can Reduce Cost Barriers to Contraception," 1999).

## Fact Sheet

- Access to birth control accounted for 75% of the reduction in pregnancy rates in adolescents between 1988 and 1995. (AGI, "Why is Teenage Pregnancy Declining?", 1999.)
- Unintended pregnancies have a personal and social cost.
  - Women who experience such pregnancies are less likely to obtain timely prenatal care than women who planned their pregnancies, increasing the likelihood of health risks;
  - An unintended pregnancy may threaten a woman's ability to complete her education and participate in the workforce;
  - Teens who experience an unintended pregnancy have a high drop-out rate (70%), and earn an average of \$5,600 annually during their first 13 years of parenthood.

### **By Preventing Unintended Pregnancy Through Access and Information, This Act Reduces the Need for Abortion**

- Access to birth control, including Emergency Contraception, reduces the incidence of abortion:
  - An estimated 51,000 abortions were averted in 2000 by women's use of emergency contraceptives. Emergency contraception accounted for 43% of the decrease in abortions between 1994 and 2000. (AGI study published in the November/December issue of *Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health*);
  - Widespread use of emergency contraception could prevent an estimated 1.7 million unintended pregnancies and 800,000 abortions each year (Glasier & Baird, 1998; Van Look & Stewart, 1998).