



POLICY Rx: Ensure Access to Comprehensive, Medically Accurate Reproductive Health Care

2019

The Issue

Ensuring that women have access to comprehensive reproductive health care services results in a wide range of [direct medical benefits](#) to women, including reduced unintended pregnancies, improved maternal health, and more effective diagnosis and treatment of sexually transmitted infections. Access to reproductive health care also [increases](#) women's economic security, educational attainment, and employment opportunities. Public policies that promote access to comprehensive reproductive health care also have enormous [economic and social value](#) to our communities, from reducing poverty to improving the educational and political autonomy of women.

Despite these well documented benefits, there has been a [tidal wave](#) of state-level political assaults on access to reproductive health care that began after the 2010 elections. Unfortunately, Wisconsin has been at the forefront of this trend. Since 2011, Wisconsin has enacted a [wide array](#) of [restrictions](#) on access to reproductive health care. A near total ban on abortions after 20 weeks of gestation, mandating that women receive medically unnecessary ultrasounds before receiving abortion care, family planning funding restrictions for federal Title X clinics and reduced birth control prescription reimbursement to family planning centers are only a few of the [many restrictions on access to care](#) that have been passed.

Many of these restrictions are not grounded in [medical evidence](#) and are opposed by the [mainstream medical](#) and [public health](#) communities. Unfortunately, these restrictions create real, and sometimes insurmountable, barriers to accessing reproductive health care for many women in Wisconsin. In addition to these political restrictions, many women and health care professionals face harassment, and sometimes even [violence](#), when they try to access or provide care from a small minority of extremist opponents of abortion. This legitimate fear of harassment and intimidation serves as a [deterrent to professionals](#) who would otherwise be willing to provide much-needed care and to women who wish to obtain care. This unique combination of political restrictions on access to care and an environment that can be intimidating to both patients and healthcare professionals is detrimental to women who need to access a fundamental aspect of health care.

This unprecedented wave of political attacks on women's access to reproductive health care has spurred advocacy organizations that support access to comprehensive reproductive health care to begin formulating a positive, [proactive](#) vision of how states can begin to create a policy environment that ensures everyone has the right to make their own reproductive healthcare decisions free from harassment, intimidation, political interference, or [false information](#).

Why Improving Access to Reproductive Health Care is Important to Women

- Access to comprehensive reproductive health care is an [essential component](#) to the overall health of women, which in turn impacts community health.
- Medically unnecessary restrictions on access to abortion create substantial barriers to care for women seeking abortion care, especially [low-income women](#) who cannot afford the costs of missing work, child care, travel, or lodging that are associated with mandatory waiting periods or clinic closures.
 - The [ban on telemedicine](#) abortions greatly affects women who are not able to afford traveling for several days at a time to receive medical attention in Madison or Milwaukee.
- Access to abortion care and clinic safety are greatly intertwined in Wisconsin. After a nationwide safety assessment of all of their clinics that was motivated by a shooting at a Colorado clinic, Planned Parenthood of Wisconsin decided it had to [close its Appleton clinic](#) because the site was not large enough to be adequately retrofitted to meet new safety guidelines. As of 2018, only three abortion clinics remain in Wisconsin: two in Milwaukee and one in Madison.

In Wisconsin, 67% of women live in a county [without](#) access to abortion services.



Wisconsin Alliance for Women's Health

What Wisconsin Can Do

Despite its troubling legislative track record since 2011, Wisconsin has also been at the national forefront of proactive reproductive health policy activism. The [RESPECT Women Act](#), which was introduced during the 2017-2018 legislative session, represents the most recent attempt push back against political attacks on reproductive health care in Wisconsin. These bills promote a vision that women should have the ability and support to make their own reproductive healthcare decisions, free from political interference and false information.

If passed, the RESPECT Women Act would do the following:

- Ensure Wisconsin women have the legal right to access comprehensive reproductive health care and repeal existing abortion restrictions that are not grounded in medical science or widely accepted medical best practices.
- Ensure all patients have the right to receive honest, medically accurate information when seeking health care.
- Improve law enforcement training regarding effective response and prevention strategies to better address harassment, intimidation and violence that is sometimes directed towards patients and providers at reproductive healthcare facilities.

How Can I Help Make Expanding Access to Reproductive Health Care a Reality in Wisconsin?

There are lots of ways you can help promote policies that would expand access to reproductive health care in Wisconsin.

- Call or email your [state legislators](#) to urge them to support the RESPECT Women Act.
- Connect with organizations already working on expanding access to care in Wisconsin:
 - [Planned Parenthood Advocates of Wisconsin](#)
 - [The Wisconsin Alliance for Women's Health](#)

Resources:

- [Gutmacher Policy Review: The Broad Benefits of Investing in Sexual and Reproductive Health](#)
- [The National Women's Law Center: Reproductive Health Is Part of the Economic Health of Women and Their Families](#)
- [National Partnership for Women and Families, Bad Medicine: How a Political Agenda is Undermining Women's Health Care](#)