

Birth Control as a Woman's Right

As part of the Birth Control Access Campaign

Why is access to oral contraceptives critical for women's equality?
Birth Control provides women with autonomy over their own bodies and reproductive systems. Prevention limits the number of unintended pregnancies. The United States has one of the highest rates of unintended pregnancies among industrialized nations - 50% of all pregnancies in the US are unintended.¹



Benefits of Birth Control

When used perfectly, the pill is 99.7% effective.² Typical use results in the pill being 92% effective. However, the pill is not only beneficial for women to control their reproductive capacity. The pill is also used for treating acne, anemia, dysmenorrhea, fibrocystic breast disease, hirsutism, irregular cycles, ovarian cysts, and premenstrual syndrome (PMS).³ The pill reduces the risk for certain types of cancer, ectopic pregnancy, osteoporosis, and pelvic inflammatory disease (PID).⁴ Although it is not recommended for prevention purposes, the pill is extremely beneficial for women's overall reproductive health.

Prevention First Act

The Prevention First Act expands access to comprehensive sex education and contraception resources to reduce the number of unintended pregnancies in the United States. More specifically, the Prevention First Act would:

- increase funding for Title X national programs and clinics;
- allow states the option of expanding Medicaid family planning services;
- require health insurance plans to cover prescription birth control;
- establish a public education program on emergency contraception (EC) with \$10 million allotted for funding;
- require emergency rooms to provide information and access to EC for victims of sexual assault;
- federally fund teen pregnancy prevention programs;
- require programs to provide information that is medically accurate and includes health benefits and effectiveness of contraceptives.⁷

Use of Contraception

Even though the Bush administration has pushed abstinence-only sex education for our youth, many women are using contraception and leading sexually active lives. 9 in 10 women between the ages of 15-44 use some contraceptive method.⁵ Planned Parenthood estimates that 16 million women are currently taking the pill on a daily basis.⁶

Issues of Access

The assault on comprehensive sex education and access to contraceptives has resulted in a decrease in family planning funding. Adjusting for inflation, since the late 1970's, federal family planning funding has plummeted. This funding is increasingly diverted into abstinence only education programs. Access to contraception and comprehensive sex and family planning education has been severely limited, particularly for teenagers and low-income women. Recently, drug pricing legislation that was part of the Deficit Reduction Act of 2005 (DRA) limited Medicaid-covered pharmaceuticals from setting a discounted price for contraceptives for college and university health centers. Since the legislation went into effect, birth control prices at these health centers have spiked. Due to this drastic price increase health centers are forced to either charge the students more for their birth control or stop selling it altogether.

1. Congresswoman Louise Slaughter, "H.R. 1709- Prevention First Act," accessed 27 June 2007 at <http://www.louise.house.gov/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=475&Itemid=0>.

2. Guttmacher Institute, "In the Know: Questions about Pregnancy, Contraception and Abortion," accessed 28 June 2007 at <<http://www.guttmacher.org/in-the-know/index.htm>>.

3. Laura Lambert, "Is the Pill Good for You?" Planned Parenthood, accessed 29 June 2007 at <<http://www.plannedparenthood.org/news-articles-press/politics-policy-issues/birth-control-access-prevention/pill-good-6494.htm>>.

4. Ibid.

5. Guttmacher Institute.

6. Laura Lambert.

7. Congresswoman Louise Slaughter and NARAL Pro-Choice America, "The Prevention First Act: Reducing the Need for Abortion" accessed 27 June 2007 at <<http://www.prochoiceamerica.org/choice-action-center/in-congress/prevention-first-act.html>>.

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