

Facts Are Important Access to Contraception Is Integral to Women's Health

Facts are very important, especially when discussing the health of women and the American public. The fact is, access to comprehensive contraceptive care and contraceptive methods is an integral component of women's health care.ⁱ Although they do protect against the spread of sexually transmitted infections, reliance on male condoms alone is not enough to prevent unintended pregnancy. Limiting all women to just one method is not an option.

Unintended pregnancy and abortion rates are higher in the United States than in most other developed countries, and low-income women have disproportionately high rates.ⁱⁱ Currently, 49% of pregnancies are unintended.ⁱⁱⁱ Reducing this high rate is a national priority reflected in the Healthy People 2020 goal to decrease the rate of unintended pregnancies from 49% to 44%.^{iv}

According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, male condoms have an 18% failure rate, which means an average of 18 pregnancies per 100 women in one year. The rate for oral contraceptives is half that, and drops to less than a one percent failure rate for long-acting reversible contraceptives, such as intrauterine devices and hormonal implants.^v

Many women also benefit from non-contraceptive uses of birth control, as hormonal contraceptives can alleviate menstrual pain, prevent menstrual migraines, reduce pelvic pain associated with endometriosis, regulate menstrual cycles, and more.^{vi}

Moreover, the financial benefit of access to contraception is clear. U.S. births from unintended pregnancies resulted in approximately \$12.5 billion in taxpayer expenditures in 2008.^{vii} Facilitating affordable access to contraceptives would not only improve health but also would reduce health care costs, as each dollar spent on publicly funded contraceptive services saves the U.S. health care system nearly \$6.^{viii} And, research has consistently shown that contraception allows women to complete their educations and pursue careers, contributing to the greater economy.^{ix}

The most effective way to reduce abortion rates is to prevent unintended pregnancy by improving access to the full range of consistent, effective, and affordable contraception.

ⁱ Access to contraception. Committee Opinion No. 615. American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists. *Obstet Gynecol* 2015;125:250–5.

ⁱⁱ Finer LB, Zolna MR. Unintended pregnancy in the United States: incidence and disparities, 2006. *Contraception* 2011;84:478–85.

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid.

^{iv} Department of Health and Human Services. Healthy People 2020 summary of objectives: family planning. Available at: <http://www.healthypeople.gov/2020/topics-objectives/topic/family-planning/objectives>. Retrieved August 4, 2014.

^v Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Effectiveness of Family Planning Methods. Available at: http://www.cdc.gov/reproductivehealth/UnintendedPregnancy/PDF/Contraceptive_methods_508.pdf. Retrieved December 1, 2015.

^{vi} Noncontraceptive uses of hormonal contraceptives. Practice Bulletin No. 110. American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists. *Obstet Gynecol* 2010;115:206–18.

^{vii} Sonfield A, Kost K. Public costs from unintended pregnancies and the role of public insurance programs in paying for pregnancy and infant care: estimates for 2008. New York (NY): Guttmacher Institute; 2013. Available at: <http://www.guttmacher.org/pubs/public-costs-of-UP.pdf>. Retrieved August 4, 2014.

^{viii} Frost JJ, Zolna MR, Frohwirth L. Contraceptive needs and services, 2010. New York (NY): Guttmacher Institute; 2013. Available at: <http://www.guttmacher.org/pubs/win/contraceptive-needs-2010.pdf>. Retrieved August 4, 2014.

^{ix} Sonfield A et al., The Social and Economic Benefits of Women's Ability to Determine Whether and When to Have Children, New York: Guttmacher Institute, 2013. Available at: www.guttmacher.org/pubs/social-economic-benefits.pdf. Retrieved December 1, 2015.