



### **Health Care Reform Should Include Women**

Editorial by Paula Gianino, President & CEO of  
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Health care reform bills are moving quickly in Washington D.C. As a trusted health care provider serving over 50,000 women a year with thousands of pap smears, breast exams, and tests for sexually transmitted disease, Planned Parenthood of the St. Louis Region and Southwest Missouri wants to make sure women's health is a priority in health care reform.

Reform is sorely needed with more than 750,000 Missourians—one out of every six—uninsured (Kaiser Family Foundation). In addition former Governor Blunt's Medicaid cuts reduced benefits for 300,000 Missourians, and eliminated Medicaid coverage for 100,000 Missourians (Missouri Citizen Education Fund). Furthermore, in 2003, the Missouri House eliminated a successful and cost-saving program that gave 30,000 Missouri women access to family planning services.

In our current health care system, women of childbearing age spend 68% more in out-of-pocket expenses than men. A recent report by the Department of Health and Human Services titled "Roadblocks to Health Care: Why the Current Health Care System Does Not Work for Women", show that "women are more vulnerable to high health care costs... [because] women's reproductive health requires more regular contact with health care providers, including yearly Pap tests, mammograms, and obstetric care." And a 2009 survey conducted for the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists found that women are delaying their annual exams as a result of the economic downturn.

Most of the news reports about the ongoing health care debate have focused on costs, pharmaceutical and hospital inpatient benefits, physician reimbursement, mandatory coverage and the possibility of a public, government-run option. But none of these have focused on the behind-the-scenes attempts of several organizations to eliminate access to women's reproductive health care in any and all versions of the bills being debated. These groups have drafted over 20 restrictive amendments to the House and Senate bills which if passed, would make coverage for women's health care worse than what it is today. And there is growing pressure from some legislators to take away *existing* benefits that most women have today.

Actions like this should be a wake-up call for all women!

Earlier this year, Congress took family planning benefits out of the stimulus bill. It seems that women's health care is always one of the first things to be on the chopping block.

If we do not act, a health care reform bill could be passed by Congress and sent to the President that eliminates access to previously-covered services like Pap smears, breast exams and comprehensive reproductive health care, and eliminates the ability to choose one's provider of choice. This would be a huge setback for women in America.

Now is the time for women to be included in this important debate. Women must demand that access to comprehensive reproductive health care services and the freedom to select their physician and health care provider be protected and included in health care reform legislation.

It would be incomprehensible if women were worse off after health care reform than they already are today.