

# the Advocate

Planned Parenthood League of Massachusetts

summer 2020

## Action & Access: PPLM Confronts the COVID-19 Crisis

**Planned Parenthood League of Massachusetts' (PPLM's) promise to care for our patients and staff—no matter what—is guiding our health centers' response to the COVID-19 pandemic. PPLM Medical Director Dr. Danielle Roncari discusses what has changed for our patients and our frontline health care providers since the pandemic hit the Commonwealth.**

### What was PPLM's immediate response to the COVID-19 pandemic?

Since our first priority is always to protect the safety of our patients and staff, we immediately put precautions in place, including pre-screening anyone entering the health centers for symptoms of COVID-19. This made it possible for us to continue to provide essential services, such as abortion, without interruption. We simultaneously launched a telehealth system, connecting patients to other services virtually. Now, patients can be seen in-person for time-sensitive family planning procedures, including birth control implants and shots, as well as HIV testing, STI treatment, and abortion. Patients can continue to schedule confidential sessions and receive care virtually from the same expert, compassionate providers without having to come into the health center.

### What types of care can patients access remotely?

Patients can access many services remotely that just a few months ago were available only by visiting one of our health centers. Our practitioners can now provide contraception consultations and prescriptions and

problem-based and follow-up care by videoconference. They can prescribe PrEP and PEP, two types of medications that prevent HIV infection. We're offering remote instruction on self-injection for patients receiving gender-affirming hormone therapy and have designed a new at-home STI kit that replicates the test a practitioner would conduct on-site. Our goal is to make sure these remote services are here to stay, because they expand overall access to sexual and reproductive health care.

### What changes were made to abortion care because of the pandemic?

Early on, we extended medication abortion availability to 11 weeks from 10, helping patients with extenuating circumstances, such as difficulties with transportation, finances, or the judicial bypass process (see page 2), access the care they need.

### What concerns do you have about how the pandemic will impact your patients' sexual and reproductive health?

We are acutely aware of the challenges our patients face. We know that public health crises disproportionately hurt

people of color, people with low incomes, and undocumented people who already face systemic barriers to accessing health care. As a critical public health provider, PPLM works every day to address these disparities and be

there for the patients who need us most. I'm proud to work with the dedicated staff in our health centers as we bring new meaning to providing care, no matter what.

**BE SMART STAY HEALTHY**  
Help us Keep You and Others Safe  
During Your Visit to Planned Parenthood

**WHILE YOU ARE IN THE HEALTH CENTER:**



Maintain cloth face covering



Wash hands at least 20 seconds



Avoid touching eyes, nose, and mouth



Do not come into the health center if you have symptoms of COVID-19



Please visit <https://bit.ly/facecovering> for more information on how to sew to make a cloth face covering.

**WE'RE HERE FOR YOU!**

CALL 1-800-258-4448  
TO BOOK YOUR APPOINTMENT.

**HOW DO I USE TELE HEALTH?**

Follow these steps and start receiving sexual and reproductive healthcare when and where you need it.



Call PPLM to request a tele health appointment at 800-258-4448



Visit [PPLM.org/tele-health](https://pplm.org/tele-health) and follow instructions to register for a Patient Portal account



Find a private & safe space for your appointment



Connect to WIFI and be available 15 minutes prior to your appointment to begin check in



**Health care is: at-home STI testing**

Visit [PPLM.org/testingkits](https://pplm.org/testingkits) for more information.



# ceo's corner

Russ Mezikofsky



**Dear Friends,**

I hope you and your loved ones are healthy and safe.

For the past several months, we have navigated a sudden pandemic only to be confronted with a longstanding crisis: violent, systemic racism. Planned Parenthood stands with the Black community in demanding swift justice and reformative action in

response to George Floyd's murder and so many other instances of racial injustice.

Black lives matter. Systemic racism has created devastating disparities in sexual and reproductive health for generations. The COVID-19 pandemic is shining a spotlight on this issue as it disproportionately ravages Black and brown communities. When this pandemic began, PPLM knew maintaining equitable access to our services was critical to keep disparities from worsening. That is why our staff is working tirelessly to ensure we meet the needs of our patients and communities. I am

grateful to the PPLM staff, leadership, volunteers, and to you—our generous supporters—for helping to sustain our work through the pandemic.

In this issue of the *Advocate*, you'll read how PPLM's health centers responded to COVID-19 (page 1). We'll update you on our efforts to protect and expand abortion access (page 2). You'll learn how PPLM's Counseling and Referral Hotline volunteers continue to answer calls—now from their homes (page 3). And I am honored to share that our staff's hard work and creativity earned national recognition (page 3).

I want to thank you, from the depths of my heart, for your generosity and your commitment to PPLM. YOU make it possible for us to fulfill our mission to provide care to all people—no matter what.

Be well,

Jennifer Childs-Roshak, MD  
President and CEO

## advocate spotlight: PPAF Protects Access to Essential Abortion Care

When COVID-19 hit Massachusetts, PPLM and its advocacy arm, the Planned Parenthood Advocacy Fund of Massachusetts (PPAF), acted swiftly to ensure people in Massachusetts could access sexual and reproductive health care—including safe, legal abortion.

Educating elected leaders about the importance of abortion access is a cornerstone of PPAF's work. These efforts paid off when the Baker administration affirmed that abortion is essential health care, and not subject to the state's order to postpone elective medical procedures during the pandemic. PPAF also deployed its advocacy power to support local COVID-19 response bills, including financial and housing assistance, and pivoted to embrace virtual organizing

and public education.

The ROE Act campaign to remove abortion restrictions carries new urgency as lawmakers in other states use COVID-19 as an excuse to limit access to abortion. Volunteers are building support in their communities by hosting virtual house parties and coffee hours, encouraging story sharing, and writing letters to their local papers.

One of the most severe barriers to abortion worsened by the pandemic is the judicial bypass process, which requires patients under 18 to go before a judge if they cannot obtain parental consent for abortion care. Court closures and stay-at-home advisories made this process even more complex. Souci Rollins, a PPLM patient navigator who prepares



Adelaide Downs

Supporters at the PPAF ROE Act Advocacy Day in November 2019.

patients for this process, says, "The logistics are being accomplished by virtual meetings, but this process still causes unnecessary and harmful delays to care."

**Visit [pplmvotes.org](http://pplmvotes.org) to learn more about the ROE Act campaign.**

# program spotlight

## National Honors for PPLM's Staff & Programs

This spring, PPLM received national recognition for excellence in three program areas central to our mission: health care, education, and research.

The Association of Planned Parenthood Leaders in Education (APPLE) selected PPLM President and CEO Dr. Jennifer Childs-Roshak and PPLM's 20-member Board of Directors for the 2020 **APPLE Tree Award** in recognition of their outstanding support and leadership of PPLM's education and training programs. Among those programs are *Get Real: Sex Education That Works*, an acclaimed curriculum for middle and high school students, and an array of popular bilingual sex education programs for parents.

PPLM also received the Planned Parenthood Federation of America's 2020 **Affiliate Clinical and Social Science Research Award** for "actively pushing patient care forward, and for the use of a variety of methodologies in support of the Planned Parenthood mission." PPLM's researchers investigate contraceptive options, abortion care and access, and other critical aspects of sexual and reproductive health care. Congratulations to the research team, Dr. Alisa Goldberg; Liz Janiak, ScD; and Jen Fortin, for their leadership of this important work.

And finally, an outside evaluator's survey of satisfaction among Planned Parenthood patients



PPLM and Planned Parenthood of Southern New England co-hosted the 2019 annual national Planned Parenthood Deeper Well education conference.

identified seven PPLM clinicians in the **top ten percent of providers nationwide**. Patients were asked about their experiences with providers and their quality of care, in areas such as communication, their role in decision making, and follow-up care. Congratulations to Deborah Bartz, MD, MPH; Cailin Duram, CNP; Gretchen Landwehr, CNM; Molly Nathanson, CNM; Meaghan E. Doyle-Malone, CNM, APRN, MSN; and Margo Searle, APC.

## PPLM Volunteers Answer the Call



"Are you an actual person?" is the first question some callers to PPLM's Sexual Health Counseling and Referral Hotline ask, surprised and grateful that they are speaking with an experienced volunteer counselor when they were

expecting a pre-recorded message. Our counselors, working remotely during the COVID-19 crisis, answer a wide range of questions on topics including pregnancy, birth control, and STIs. They provide more than 200 callers weekly with free, confidential guidance, referrals, and information about sexual and reproductive health.

When the COVID-19 pandemic reached the Commonwealth, PPLM promptly arranged for volunteers to remotely answer callers' questions.

PPLM Hotline Supervisor Margaret Batten notes that many callers are expressing more anxiety and stress during this crisis. "We have callers whose families have been affected by the virus, who are isolated, who are out-of-state and lack access to abortion and other services. They feel more vulnerable, and our counselors are responding with tremendous compassion and skill. In this time of crisis, the PPLM Hotline enables us to connect with the community and let people know we are all in this together—and that PPLM is there for them if they need us."

# familiar faces, virtual spaces

## Giving Thanks to PPLM's Frontline Staff

We are thankful to each and every frontline health care provider who has worked to keep our doors open during the COVID-19 pandemic. Their commitment, compassion, skill, creativity, professionalism, and bravery ensure we can, indeed, provide care—no matter what.

Please join us in thanking our dedicated frontline staff members by visiting [pplm.org/thankyou](https://www.pplm.org/thankyou) to send a message of thanks directly to our health center team.

### PPLM welcomes Alexis McGill Johnson

as the Planned Parenthood Federation of America (PPFA) and the Planned Parenthood Action Fund (PPAF) new permanent president and CEO, pictured here with Dr. Jennifer Childs-Roshak in October 2019.



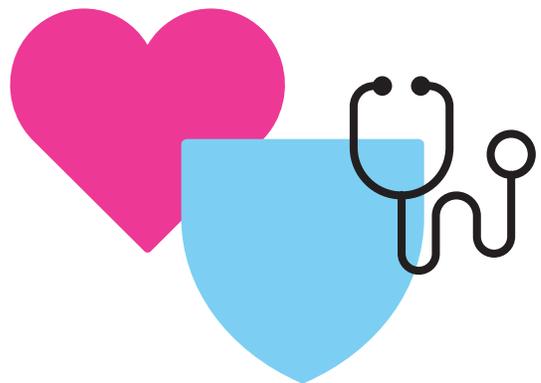
Russ Mezikofsky



Boston health center staff member opening a shipment of personal protective equipment (PPE) donated by a generous PPLM supporter.

## Thank YOU!

Thank you for your partnership and for your loyal support, which has enabled PPLM to meet the needs of our patients during these unprecedented times. We will meet this challenge as we have all others—together, no matter what.



Please support PPLM today by visiting [www.pplm.org/donate](https://www.pplm.org/donate) or emailing [development@pplm.org](mailto:development@pplm.org).