

Disrupting Disparities, Achieving Health Equity: PPLM's New Strategic Plan



Natasha Moustache

Dear Friends,

This summer, I spent a few days fly fishing in Oregon, truly disconnecting and slowing down for the first time in a long while. I'm always grateful for the chance to be outside in nature and clear my head of the relentless 24-hour news cycle.

Returning home, it was barely a moment before I was

bombarded by headlines announcing the Trump-Pence administration's latest efforts to undermine health care access and take away our hard-won reproductive rights. As you would expect, Planned Parenthood's response was to act swiftly and forcefully to protect the health and rights of the patients and communities we serve.

Our health care services aren't "political" yet they are *politicized*, time and time again. We refuse to cower to politicians who would prefer to see our health centers shut down and our patients unable to receive care. So, we fight back - and fight back until we win.

Our Vision: A Commonwealth where sexual health is recognized as essential to every person's overall health, well-being, and happiness, and where your access to care does not depend on your race or your zip code.

But it's simply not enough to keep our heads above water and react to the latest attack. We need to make bold, proactive change at the local level. We need to address the health inequities that have adversely affected communities across Massachusetts long before November 2016.

That's why I'm proud to announce Planned Parenthood League of Massachusetts' ambitious new Strategic Plan: *Disrupting Disparities, Achieving Equity*. Our plan, which you'll read about in this issue of *The Advocate*, is focused on expanding access to care, decreasing stigma, and promoting sexual and reproductive health equity in cities and towns across the Commonwealth. After all, despite Massachusetts' consistent leadership in health care access, we see from the public health data and hear from conversations in our communities that:

- **people of color in Massachusetts** do not have equitable access to sexual and reproductive health care or sex education;
- **people of color, people facing geographic barriers, people with low incomes, and young people in Massachusetts** do not have equitable access to safe, legal abortion; and
- these barriers to accessing care result in **poor health outcomes** and perpetuate health inequities.

These health injustices are an affront to our mission. Our goal in the coming months and years is to make measurable strides in dismantling these entrenched barriers and building healthier communities across the state.

As we take on these bold initiatives and critical work, I want to thank you again for your steadfast support, your commitment to our patients, and your partnership in fighting for a world where *all* people can live healthy, full lives.

Jennifer Childs-Roshak, MD, MBA
President and CEO

PPLM Strategic Initiatives

Passing Proactive Policy. No young person should be forced to plead their case to a judge in order to access abortion. No person confronting a fatal fetal diagnosis later in pregnancy should be forced to travel cross country to access abortion. No one should be denied an abortion because they lack insurance. Yet these are the realities our patients face.

The ROE Act is bold, proactive legislation that will dismantle these barriers, ensuring abortion is not only safe and legal but accessible and affordable for all. The Planned Parenthood Advocacy Fund's (PPAF) fast-paced campaign to pass the ROE Act is building a groundswell of support.

When a legislative hearing was held for the bill in June, PPAF and its coalition partners organized patients, physicians, and legal advocates who filled the Massachusetts State House and delivered powerful testimony supporting the bill.

"My last patient who was forced to go to court was in foster care, which meant she had no choice but to go to a judge," Dr. Luu Ireland, a Central Massachusetts OB-GYN, testified. "This young woman had to take additional time off from school, obtain a lawyer, find funds and transportation, and navigate the court system before she could obtain her abortion."

Now, the campaign continues in full force to advance the ROE Act. Learn more about the ROE Act and how to get involved at pplmvotes.org/ROE



Equitable Access to Safe, Legal Abortion Through Innovations in Care and Policy

IMAGES: **1.** Dr. Luu Ireland testifying at the ROE Act legislative hearing at the Massachusetts State House in June (credit: Nina Gallant). **2.** Physicians testifying at the ROE Act legislative hearing at the Massachusetts State House in June (credit: Nina Gallant). **3.** Members of the Worcester *Get Real* Teen Council, PPLM's youth peer education group.

Removing Geographic Barriers. Not all barriers to abortion are rooted in laws. Residents of the South Coast and the Cape and Islands have no local abortion provider to turn to for care.

PPLM's Medical Director Dr. Danielle Roncari notes, "We see patients who struggle to navigate the complicated and hours-long trip from the Cape to Boston. Your zip code should never determine your ability to access care, but, right now, it does."

PPLM intends to fix this inequity. By partnering with fellow health care providers and harnessing telemedicine innovations, PPLM is implementing ways to ensure Southeastern Massachusetts residents can access the services they need, where they live.



Decreasing Sexual Health Stigma in Worcester.

In Worcester, Latino/a/x and Hispanic teens are confronted by multiple systemic barriers to sex education and contraception, including stigma, misinformation, and a lack of culturally competent care that meets their social, cultural, and linguistic needs. PPLM is actively partnering with the community to break down these barriers.

PPLM's educators are reaching out to teens in schools, in community settings, and in programs for pregnant and parenting youth, offering information about preventing sexually transmitted infections and unintended pregnancies. PPLM is also collaborating with community partners to implement sex education in public schools and to create marketing campaigns that meaningfully reflect the communities we serve.

"I've spoken with young parents whose doctors didn't talk to them about their birth control options until after they became pregnant and who experienced stigma from their community during their pregnancy. We need to support our young people and give them all the information they need to make the best decisions for their health, lives, and futures."

- Adriana Ojeda, PPLM Bilingual Community Health Educator



Equitable Access to Care and Education

Decreasing New HIV Infections in Springfield.

Systemic barriers to care have caused severe health disparities in Springfield communities. According to the Massachusetts Department of Public Health, Black and Hispanic/Latino people represented 74% of new HIV infections in Springfield from 2013 through 2015. In 2017, Black and Hispanic/Latino people represented 79% of people living with HIV/AIDS in Springfield. Given these troubling statistics, PPLM is prioritizing HIV prevention initiatives as part of its strategic plan.

Key to this effort is improving access to services like PrEP (pre-exposure prophylaxis) and PEP (post-exposure prophylaxis), medications that significantly reduce the chances of contracting HIV. Reducing the cost and removing other barriers to obtaining these medications, in combination with community partnerships and culturally appropriate sex education, has the potential to reduce new HIV infections among people who are Black and/or Latino/a/x by 10% in Springfield.

"When a patient recently tested as HIV positive in our Springfield health center, we were immediately able to get them connected into HIV care that same day, thanks to a new partnership with the local hospital BayState Health."

- Kate Sacco, PPLM Springfield Health Center Manager



faces & places



Above: PPLM and Planned Parenthood of Southern New England (PPSNE) staff at the national Planned Parenthood Deeper Well education conference in August, which PPLM co-hosted. Right: PPAF and NARAL Pro-Choice Massachusetts staff at the ROE Act legislative hearing at the Massachusetts State House in June. Bottom: PPAF volunteers and supporters at the Boston Pride March in June (credit: Nina Gallant).

NEW BOARD MEMBERS

Welcome to the PPLM Family!
PPLM welcomes the newest members of our Board of Directors: John Trobaugh, Dharma Cortés, Sandra Galea, and Renée Landers (not pictured).



SAVE THE DATE!

President's Society Conference
November 19th



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