

For Immediate Release

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Contact: Vincent Eng

+1 703 981 6636

media@healthlaw.org

Washington, DC - Today, the National Health Law Program (NHeLP) urged the Administration to protect women's access to health care. NHeLP expressed concerns that women's health opponents in Congress and their allies are pressuring the Administration to include an expansive refusal clause that would deprive millions of women coverage for birth control through their employer-sponsored health plans. ([Letter](#))

"Women's health opponents want to allow a woman's employer to decide whether or not she can use birth control," said Emily Spitzer, NHeLP executive director. "We hope President Obama will fulfill the promise of the Affordable Care Act by protecting women's access to health care, and ensuring that women are able to make decisions about their own health."

The Affordable Care Act (ACA) requires new insurance plans to cover preventive services listed in Health and Human Services' (HHS) guidelines, without cost-sharing. HHS charged the Institute of Medicine (IOM) with making evidence-based recommendations about what services should be included under the broad umbrella of women's preventive health services. HHS adopted all of the IOM's recommendations around women's health, including the recommendation to require insurance coverage for all FDA-approved contraceptives.

Recently, HHS proposed a rule that would allow some religious employers to refuse to cover birth control, as they would otherwise have to do under the law. Women's health opponents are now pressuring the Administration to adopt an even broader refusal clause - one that would allow a much larger category of employers to refuse to cover contraception.

"All women, regardless of where they work, should have access to the care they need, including birth control," said Susan Berke Fogel, NHeLP director of reproductive health. "The standard for that care should be the best medical evidence and patient needs, not politics."

Family planning services are an essential preventive service for the health of women and their families. Birth control use is nearly universal by women who are sexually active with a male partner. This is true for nearly all women, of all religious denominations. The requirement to provide birth control coverage without cost-sharing would help many women access care they might not otherwise be able to afford.

Documented in NHeLP's 2010 report, [Health Care Refusals: Undermining Quality Care for Women](#), medical standards of care require that providers offer women with certain health conditions, such as heart disease, diabetes, epilepsy, lupus, obesity, and cancer, information and services necessary to prevent pregnancy. Refusal clauses - like the one the Administration is considering - conflict with these professionally developed and accepted medical standards of care, and have adverse health consequences for women and their families.

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Founded in 1969, the National Health Law Program works with and on behalf of limited-income people, people with disabilities, and children to improve their access to quality health care and to enforce their legal rights to health. NHeLP works with courts, government agencies, and Congress to ensure quality health care for the most vulnerable members of our society.