

For Immediate Release

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Washington, DC - The National Health Law Program (NHeLP) welcomed today's announcement by the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to issue a final rule requiring insurance plans to cover women's preventive health services, including contraception, without charging them co-payments and deductibles.

"We are extremely pleased the Administration held firm on its promise to ensure women have access to the care they need, including family planning," said Emily Spitzer, NHeLP executive director. "Today's decision will ensure that millions of women have access to coverage of birth control. Because cost is often a barrier to consistent contraception use, the requirement to provide birth control coverage without cost-sharing will help many women access care they might not otherwise be able to afford."

The Affordable Care Act (ACA) requires new insurance plans to cover preventive health services without cost-sharing. HHS charged the Institute of Medicine (IOM) with making evidence-based recommendations about the services to be included within women's preventive health services. In August, 2011, HHS published an interim final rule adopting all of the IOM's

recommendations on women's health, including a recommendation that requires insurance coverage for all FDA-approved contraceptives. The August rule also included a provision that allows some religious employers to refuse to provide insurance coverage for birth control, as they would otherwise have to do under the law. The final rule retains the existing exception for certain religious employers and gives non-profit religious employers an extended time period - until August 1, 2013 - to comply with the law.

"Today's decision is a significant triumph for millions of women with health insurance - and one that will ensure most women have access to birth control without expensive co-pays," said Susan Berke Fogel, NHeLP director of reproductive health. "The religious-employer exception, however, will continue to allow some employers to interfere with the health needs of their employees. All women, regardless of where they work or go to school, should have access to the health care they need, including birth control. We will continue to work with HHS to implement the law to ensure that all women benefit from these robust protections."

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 - including the religious-employer exception affirmed today - conflict with these accepted professional medical standards 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.