



FIGO
INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION
OF
GYNECOLOGY & OBSTETRICS

Women's access to contraception at risk

FIGO supports World Contraception Day (26 September 2017)

Statement from the International Federation of Gynecology and Obstetrics (FIGO) on World Contraception Day 2017

It is estimated that family planning alone has the potential to reduce maternal mortality globally by 30%. For far too many, access to contraception also means the difference between life and death. As many as 44,000 women die every year¹ from unsafe abortion complications in an attempt to end an unintended pregnancy. Access to contraception means better health and wellbeing, while also enabling a woman to achieve her dreams: finishing school, reaching her career goals or caring for the children she already has.

It is therefore dismaying that the US government in January reinstated, renamed and expanded the Mexico City Policy (now titled: Protecting Life in Global Health Assistance), which bans US federal funds for foreign organisations that provide, counsel or refer women for abortion care. Soon after, the US government also defunded the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), a global leader in sexual and reproductive health. Last year alone, US support for UNFPA helped prevent 320,000 unintended pregnancies and 100,000 unsafe abortions by providing 800,000 people with access to contraception. These disappointing policies have a history of serious unintended consequences. When support from a major donor like the United States is uncertain and vacillating, it becomes difficult to make steady and long-lasting improvements in women's health globally.

Worldwide, there are 214 million women² who want to prevent a pregnancy but lack access to modern contraception. In sub-Saharan Africa alone, more than 20% of women have an unmet need for contraception. According to the Guttmacher Institute, abortion rates have declined significantly in developed countries since 1990, but not in developing countries. Sadly, the Protecting Life in Global Health Assistance policy, which is intended to reduce abortion - a goal shared by all - may actually contribute to increasing abortion by reducing family planning services and increasing illegal abortions which not infrequently result in the woman's death.

Contraception is an integral part of women's health. If every woman who wanted modern contraception had access, unintended pregnancy would decline by 70%, unsafe abortions by 74% and maternal mortality by 30%. Every \$1 invested in universal contraceptive access would save countries \$120. We need funding solutions that will propel us toward the goal of 100% access. The wellbeing of women and girls extends to the wellbeing of society.

FIGO members must safeguard the fundamental health, wellbeing and rights of women and girls. We should work together to develop solutions that can withstand funding and policy cycles from major donors which threaten women's ability to consistently have access to safe health care.

Fortunately, there have been some heartening signs. New efforts like 'She Decides', a global fundraising initiative to support the full spectrum of reproductive health care, have brought together world leaders from the Netherlands to Canada, all in support of women's fundamental reproductive health rights and freedom.

We call upon FIGO members to work with national policymakers, contraceptive suppliers, providers and civil society to ensure that women and girls everywhere can exercise their fundamental right to health, including access to contraceptive services. The women and girls we serve as providers, advocates and policymakers are counting on us to ensure their reproductive rights and health are protected, respected and promoted.

Sources/resources:

If you have difficulty accessing these links, please cut and paste them into your browser:

<https://www.your-life.com/en/for-doctors-parents-etc/about-wcd/>

References:

- ¹<https://www.guttmacher.org/fact-sheet/induced-abortion-worldwide>
http://www.who.int/reproductivehealth/topics/unsafe_abortion/magnitude/en/
- ²<https://www.guttmacher.org/fact-sheet/adding-it-up-contraception-mnh-2017>