

A Brief Rundown of Reproductive Rights

Birth Control and EC

- The right to privacy, including the right to use contraception, was recognized by the Supreme Court more than 30 years ago. By using birth control, women have been able to limit unintended pregnancies, determining the timing and size of their families. Most people can't imagine losing this right; yet, opponents of contraception are intent on controlling our government and the courts.
- The development of emergency contraception (EC) means that women can, at last, safely reduce the risk of pregnancy when their contraception fails or in the case of unprotected intercourse, such as rape. Many women still do not know about EC or how to obtain it. A doctor's prescription is still needed in most states; and since every hour counts when taking EC, NOW activists have pressed the FDA to make this option available over-the-counter in pharmacies.
- Barriers created by a lack of information, health insurance or economic means continue to place birth control and EC out of the reach of many women, often the women who need them the most. Anti-choice pharmacists and hospitals also block access to contraception.

Reproductive Health

- Women's reproductive health comprises much more than birth control and abortion. It begins with comprehensive sex education in our schools and affordable family health care so that mothers can raise healthy girls. Preventative care is important, like the new HPV vaccine that can save girls and women from contracting a virus that causes cervical cancer. Preventing and detecting HIV is also a matter of life and death for many women.
- When women choose to have children, they must have access to adequate and affordable pre- and post-natal health care. Birthing choices, such as midwives or vaginal births after cesarean, must be available.
- Mothers must be supported in the workplace through maternity leave policies, accommodations for breastfeeding, flexible time, and other family-friendly practices.
- Health care, child care, continuing education, jobs, housing and transportation are all crucial elements in allowing women to build healthy families and to lead healthy lives of their own with dignity and empowerment. NOW is working to make this dream a reality.

Abortion Rights

- In 1973, the Supreme Court's Roe v. Wade decision legalized abortion in the U.S. The backlash began immediately, and attacks have grown in recent years. States are passing bans that outlaw nearly all abortions. Congress is outlawing specific procedures and trying to grant rights to embryos and fetuses.

- In 1976 the Hyde Amendment cut off funding for abortion to women who cannot afford health care. The Hyde Amendment and state parental involvement laws have resulted in the deaths of women driven to back alley abortions. NOW fights every day against restrictions that make “choice” meaningless.
- Opponents of abortion use clinic violence and harassment to prevent women from exercising their rights and drive away doctors and staff from providing services. As a result, 87% of U.S. counties have no abortion provider, and fewer new doctors are getting trained to perform abortion procedures.
- So-called Crisis Pregnancy Centers use misinformation and intimidation to keep women from obtaining abortions. Often they are located right next to a legitimate women’s clinic.

This page has been adapted from NOW’s brochure, “We Want Reproductive Justice NOW!”