



THE COST OF BEING A WOMAN

HEALTHCARE FUNDING CRISIS

CAPSULE TWO

SECTION 1

MARCH 30TH - APRIL 12TH 2026

OVERVIEW

Our first policy focus for our second capsule, *Protecting Care, Protecting Choice*, centers on reproductive health access, public healthcare funding, and the structural barriers that shape women's ability to obtain affordable, comprehensive care. Since its founding, NOW has worked to dismantle systemic inequities in healthcare access, particularly through defending reproductive freedom, expanding public health funding, and opposing policies that restrict access to essential healthcare services.

FOUNDATIONS

Beginning in the late 1960s and early 1970s, NOW established its foundational healthcare agenda as access to care became central to women's equality. In 1967, at its second national conference, NOW adopted the Equal Rights Amendment, repeal of abortion laws, and publicly funded childcare as core goals in its "Bill of Rights for Women," becoming the first national organization to endorse abortion legalization. Between 1970 and 1971, NOW campaigned for the Comprehensive Child Care Act, which was vetoed by President Richard Nixon. These early efforts framed healthcare and care infrastructure as essential to women's equality and public responsibility.

ACHIEVEMENTS

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, NOW expanded its healthcare advocacy as a matter of civil rights and public health, supporting abortion access following *Roe v. Wade*, organizing clinic escort programs to protect patients, and establishing rape crisis centers and hotlines that advanced recognition of sexual violence as a systemic issue requiring institutional response and funding. During this period, NOW also challenged federal funding restrictions and constitutional efforts to limit reproductive rights, while elevating awareness of disparities in healthcare access through initiatives like the Women of Color and Reproductive Freedom conference and increasing legal and direct action against clinic blockades and provider-targeted violence. From the 1990s through the 2000s, NOW focused more directly on federal healthcare policy and funding structures, supporting the Violence Against Women Act to secure resources for survivor services, opposing both domestic and global gag rules that restricted reproductive healthcare information and funding, and advocating for expanded access to emergency contraception and comprehensive rape treatment standards. In the 2006–2016 period, NOW further strengthened legal and policy advocacy to protect patient health, supported broader and more equitable access to contraception, reinforced healthcare protections through marriage equality, and continued challenging regulatory, legal, and funding barriers that limited access to comprehensive, affordable care.



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LEGISLATION

NOW actively monitors and supports federal legislation aimed at protecting healthcare access and public health infrastructure, including:

- S.1506 / H.R.3069 – Medicare for All Act
- H.R.7727 – Sustaining Rural Healthcare Act

TODAY

From 2016 to the present, NOW has focused on defending healthcare access amid rising state restrictions, clinic closures, and instability in public health funding. Following major legal and policy shifts in reproductive healthcare, NOW has prioritized protecting clinic funding, opposing restrictions on healthcare systems, and defending access to preventive and essential care. NOW emphasizes that funding decisions directly determine whether services exist, particularly for low-income women, rural communities, and women of color who are disproportionately impacted by provider shortages and underfunded systems.

Closely tied to NOW's policy agenda are strategies for community and individual action. Chapters can bring this work to life by:

- Organizing clinic escort programs and patient protection efforts
- Hosting education on reproductive healthcare access and navigation
- Supporting coalitions defending healthcare funding and infrastructure
- Advocating for expanded public healthcare funding and protection of essential services

Through sustained advocacy and grassroots mobilization, NOW continues to confront the structural forces that determine whether healthcare is accessible. By linking federal policy, public funding, and community organizing, NOW ensures healthcare remains a protected public good and a foundation of women's equality.