



# THE COST OF BEING A WOMAN

## MEDICARE FOR ALL

CAPSULE TWO

SECTION 2

APRIL 13<sup>TH</sup> - APRIL 26<sup>TH</sup> 2026

### OVERVIEW

Our second policy focus for our second capsule, *Protecting Care, Protecting Choice*, centers on universal healthcare access and the structural inequities that shape who can obtain comprehensive, affordable care. Since its founding, NOW has worked to challenge a healthcare system tied to employment, income, and geography, advocating for healthcare as a fundamental right essential to women's autonomy and equality.

### FOUNDATIONS

Beginning in the late 1960s and early 1970s, NOW established its foundational healthcare agenda by framing reproductive care and access to services as central to women's equality. In 1967, NOW called for the repeal of anti-abortion laws, and through its support of *Roe v. Wade*, helped expand access to reproductive healthcare and affirm it as essential to bodily autonomy. Between 1970 and 1971, NOW campaigned for the Comprehensive Child Care Act, which sought to establish publicly funded childcare infrastructure, reducing economic barriers and supporting broader access to health and family services. These early efforts positioned healthcare not as a privilege, but as a public responsibility tied to gender equity.

### ACHIEVEMENTS

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, NOW linked healthcare access to economic security and workplace equality. In 1978, NOW supported the passage of the Pregnancy Discrimination Act, prohibiting pregnancy-based discrimination and strengthening women's ability to maintain employment and healthcare coverage, while also leading campaigns to protect abortion access. During the late 1980s and early 1990s, NOW expanded its approach by advocating for comprehensive support systems addressing violence and health. Through its work on the Violence Against Women Act, NOW helped secure federal funding for survivor services and organized large-scale mobilizations emphasizing healthcare as a fundamental right. From the late 1990s through the 2000s, NOW focused on reducing barriers to care, including advocating for over-the-counter emergency contraception in 2003 and pushing for extended health coverage for workers affected by the September 11 attacks. In the 2006–2016 period, NOW more explicitly advanced universal healthcare solutions, advocating for a single-payer system during debates over the Affordable Care Act while also working to protect and expand reproductive healthcare access under the law.



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### LEGISLATION

NOW actively monitors and supports federal legislation aimed at establishing and expanding universal healthcare, including:

- S.1506 / H.R.3069 – Medicare for All Act
- H.R.4313 – Hospital Inpatient Services Modernization Act
- S.2286 – State-Based Universal Health Care Act of 2025

### TODAY

From 2016 to the present, NOW has prioritized defending and expanding healthcare access while advancing comprehensive universal coverage. NOW is listed among national organizations endorsing the Medicare for All Act, reinforcing its long-standing support for a single-payer system. The organization has also actively organized to defend the Affordable Care Act amid repeal efforts, emphasizing its role in expanding preventive care and opposing policies that would cut Medicaid and undermine coverage. NOW continues to highlight that true healthcare equity requires a universal system that guarantees access regardless of employment, income, or geography.

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

- Educating communities on Medicare for All and universal healthcare proposals
- Supporting coalitions advocating for single-payer healthcare systems
- Engaging in legislative advocacy to expand access to comprehensive care
- Promoting public awareness of healthcare inequities and economic barriers

Through sustained advocacy and grassroots mobilization, NOW continues to challenge a fragmented and inequitable healthcare system. By advancing Medicare for All and universal coverage, NOW works to ensure that healthcare is treated not as a commodity, but as a fundamental human right essential to gender justice and human dignity.