

Planned Parenthood of Greater Northern New Jersey
Statement on Health Care Reform
July 15, 2009
The Statehouse Room 109, Trenton, NJ

Good Morning. I am Selina Winchester, Public Information Director at Planned Parenthood of Greater Northern New Jersey based in Morristown. For more than 90 years, Planned Parenthood has been there, addressing health care disparities and bringing equity of care. Our affiliate provides reproductive health services to 35,000 women and men in seven counties in New Jersey, and is part of the national organization that provides services to 3 million people.

Our patients are under-insured, uninsured, the working poor, and represent the wide array of racial and ethnic diversities of this nation. Many fall below 150% of the Federal poverty level, making Planned Parenthood their only option – often because of our reduced cost of services based on income level, and also due to access to our health centers. Poverty disproportionately affects women, where in 2006, compared to men at 11.1 percent, more than 14 percent of women lived in households with incomes below the Federal poverty level.

Today, with this challenging economy, we at the Greater Northern affiliate, as well as other affiliates, are experiencing an increase in new patients, many of whom suffered a loss of insurance due to loss of employment or reduced hours that disqualified them from health care benefits.

Though we provide annual visits for basic reproductive health maintenance, women and men come to Planned Parenthood with existing concerns that require attention – now. As Congress debate and approve their committees' versions of health care legislation, we at Planned Parenthood believe that two goals will address the disparities that affect our patients – now:

- ✚ We want to ensure that essential community providers like Planned Parenthood are included in the health network. Our health centers are a critical entry point into the health care system for millions of Americans.
 - For many patients, their visits to health centers like Planned Parenthood would be their only contact with a doctor or a nurse.
 - Hospitals often are located outside the communities, presenting a burden to access to care.

- ✚ We also want to ensure coverage for comprehensive reproductive health care benefits. Women's health must be a priority.
 - More than six in 10 patients who receive care at health centers like Planned Parenthood consider it their primary source of health care.
 - One in four women who receives contraceptives does so at a women's health center.
 - One in six women who obtain a Pap test or a pelvic exam does so at a women's health center.
 - One-third of all women who receive counseling, testing or treatment for sexually transmitted infections do so at a women's health center.

Yet, there is growing pressure to take away existing benefits that most women have now.

The report released today by the New Jersey Health Care for America Now campaign details how the state's communities of color are adversely affected by our nation's broken health care system. The gender disparities are also staggering.

We know today that:

- Women of child-bearing age spend a remarkable 68 percent more in out-of-pocket health care cost more than men, in part because of reproductive health-related expenses. Childbirth and reproductive care are the most common reasons for these women to use health care services. Repeat visits during prenatal care, post-natal care, Pap follow-up services including

specialty services like colposcopies and cryosurgeries, and essential birth control maintenance drive up women's health care cost.

We also know that:

- Although 98 percent of women use contraception at some point in their lives, family planning and reproductive health care are still not entirely part of the mainstream health care coverage. This is often an out-of-pocket expense for women.

We know that:

- Women are delaying their annual gynecological check-up, which includes a breast examination, as a result of the downturn in the economy. This often leads to poor outcomes for women and their families.

We know that:

- Women in 80 percent of the counties in this nation do not have access to essential reproductive health care. They live in rural areas or they live in great distances from a hospital or ambulatory services.

We know that we need health care reform, - now. We at Planned Parenthood will continue to push for a health care system that includes community health centers like Planned Parenthood among its network of providers. We will also push to ensure that women are not worse off than they are right now.

Health coverage is a fundamental need and it is needed now.