

What Does Family Planning Have to do With HIV? Everything.

Voluntary family planning is an indispensable component of HIV prevention and treatment.

The majority of new HIV infections are sexually transmitted. The same people who are at risk of unintended pregnancy are also at risk of HIV infection. Voluntary family planning programs give women, youth, and men the information and services they need to protect themselves and their partners from unintended pregnancies, HIV, and other sexually transmitted infections.¹

Voluntary family planning programs increase access to and uptake of HIV prevention information and services. Voluntary family planning and other reproductive health services are an important entry point to addressing HIV risk factors (including gender-based violence and sexual coercion), safe sex negotiation, voluntary counseling and testing, prevention of vertical transmission of HIV, and other prevention interventions. These services also reach women, youth, and men who would not seek out HIV services independent of other health services because of stigma or other barriers.²

Linking voluntary family planning and HIV programs improves access to quality health services. Linking HIV and reproductive health programs, like voluntary family planning and maternal health, improves access to both HIV and reproductive health services, reduces HIV-related stigma and discrimination, and extends programs to underserved populations.³

Access to voluntary family planning services promotes human rights and increases the quality of life of women, youth, and men living with HIV. All individuals – including those living with HIV – have the basic right to decide the number and spacing of their children and to have the information, education, and means to do so, free from discrimination, coercion, and violence. Access to voluntary family planning services ensures that women, youth and men living with HIV can exercise their right to the highest attainable standard of sexual and reproductive health, and allows for the management of family size and prevention of vertical transmission of HIV.⁴

Voluntary family planning services provide access to critical prevention methods, including female and male condoms. Women, youth, and men living with HIV have a higher risk of contracting sexually transmitted infections, including additional strains of HIV. Correct and consistent use of female and male condoms is the only method that reduces both this risk and the risk of unintended pregnancy.⁵

Access to voluntary family planning services decreases maternal deaths among women and girls living with HIV. Women and girls living with HIV are more likely to experience pregnancy complications, and are at a higher risk of maternal death. Voluntary family planning and other reproductive health programs empower women living with HIV to prevent health complications related to unintended pregnancies and to plan pregnancies based on their child-bearing desires and health needs.⁶

¹UNAIDS. "Sexual Transmission of HIV." Accessed May 18, 2011. <http://www.unaids.org/en/strategygoalsby2015/sexualtransmissionofhiv/>.

²Kennedy et al. *Journal of the International AIDS Society*, 13:26, 2010. <http://www.jiasociety.org/content/13/1/26>.

³Singh S et al., *Adding It Up: The Costs and Benefits of Investing in Family Planning and Maternal and Newborn Health*, 30. New York: Guttmacher Institute and United Nations Population Fund, 2009.

⁴UN General Assembly, 87th Plenary Meeting. Political Declaration on HIV/ AIDS, Resolution 60/262. New York, June 2, 2006.

⁵PATH, UNFPA. *Female Condom: A Powerful Tool for Protection*. Seattle: UNFPA, PATH; 2006.

⁶*The Lancet*. "HIV and Maternal Mortality: Turning the Tide." Vol. 375, Is. 9730: 1948 - 1949, June 5, 2010.

Family Planning Restrictions and the Effect on HIV/AIDS

Attacks on international family planning¹ funding and policy hinder the progress of U.S. efforts to provide effective HIV prevention, care, and treatment through the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) strategy. Here are three big threats:

Reduced Funding for International Family Planning:

Insufficient funding for voluntary family planning services reduces access to some of the most basic tools for HIV prevention and treatment. Family planning providers are at the center of the HIV pandemic. They have the skills and the opportunity to provide quality, rights-based, comprehensive services that integrate and link HIV/AIDS, maternal health, and voluntary family planning; address gender-based violence; support comprehensive sex education; and engage men and boys.

How insufficient funding for family planning affects the fight against HIV/AIDS:

- Cuts to family planning funding would result in increased unintended pregnancies, abortions, and maternal deaths among women, including those living with HIV.
- Funding cuts to family planning would weaken global efforts to combat gender-based violence, stigma, and gender inequality, which drive the HIV/AIDS epidemic.
- Reproductive health programs (including family planning) are often the point of entry for those seeking testing and treatment for HIV. Without sufficient funds, the reach of these programs is limited.
- Effective integration and linking of HIV/AIDS, maternal health, and voluntary family planning depends on robust funding for all three services. Insufficient funding for one program area compromises overall health outcomes.

Eliminating the U.S. contribution to UNFPA: UNFPA (United Nations Population Fund) is the largest multilateral provider of voluntary family planning and maternal health services globally. UNFPA also provides critical HIV/AIDS services, such as promoting comprehensive female and male condom programming and integrating HIV services within reproductive health programming (including family planning).

How eliminating the U.S. contribution to UNFPA affects the fight against HIV/AIDS:

- UNFPA reaches countries that U.S. family planning and PEPFAR funding do not. Eliminating the U.S. contribution would decrease access to HIV/AIDS, family planning, and other reproductive health services worldwide.

Imposing the Global Gag Rule (or Mexico City Policy): The Global Gag Rule prohibits foreign organizations receiving U.S. family planning funds from using their own non-U.S. funds to provide information about abortion, to offer referrals or services for legal abortion, or to advocate for the legalization or decriminalization of abortion.

How imposing the Global Gag Rule affects the fight against HIV/AIDS:

- The Global Gag Rule has resulted in reproductive health programs (including family planning) losing access to U.S.-donated contraceptives and significant financial resources, causing staff and service reductions.²
- The Global Gag Rule puts the lives of women living with HIV at risk. Women living with HIV who are seeking voluntary abortion services stake their lives on access to honest information from their health providers, including provision of or referral to safe, legal abortion services.

¹The term "family planning" refers to the family planning/reproductive health line item in the annual Department of State, Foreign Operations and Related Programs Appropriations legislation.

²Leitner Center for International Law and Justice at Fordham Law School. *Exporting Confusion U.S. Foreign Policy as an Obstacle to the Implementation of Ethiopia's Liberalized Abortion Law*, pp. 13-14. New York City, New York, 2010.