



## **RWV Action Alert: Tell Washington contraception is prevention!**

The new health care reform law will lower the cost of preventive services for women by eliminating co-pays and deductibles for these services in all new insurance plans. Amazingly, however, there is no guarantee that “preventive services” will be defined to include birth control!

Now is the time to tell Secretary of Health and Human Services (HHS) Kathleen Sebelius we want her to make sure comprehensive contraceptive care is included in the guidelines her agency will release later this year for implementation of the women’s preventive services portion of the health reform law.

You can reach her by email at [Healthreform@hhs.gov](mailto:Healthreform@hhs.gov) or by calling the Department of Health and Human Services at 1-202-205-5445.

### **Background on the issue**

A May 2009 report by the Commonwealth Foundation found that nearly half of women delayed or avoided preventive care due to cost. The new health care reform law, known as the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, addresses this problem by requiring all new private insurance plans written after mid-September to cover several categories of preventive services without any cost sharing (including co-payments, coinsurance and deductibles for all expenses that must be met before coverage kicks in). The categories of services to be covered include preventive care and screenings for women as recommended by guidelines to be developed by the Department of HHS.

Although the law leaves it to the HHS guidelines to spell out the specific services, at the time that lawmakers adopted the provision several praised its inclusion of family planning. In addition to this clear history of Congressional intent, a recent article in the *Guttmacher Policy Review* outlined a far-reaching public health consensus in support of family planning as preventive health care:

- Family planning has been listed as a preventive health service in every edition of the federal Healthy People series from 1979-2010;
- The federal law authorizing community health centers lists family planning among the preventive health services that the centers are required to provide, and numerous other

- federal programs and regulations also identify family planning as a critical preventive health service, and;
- Health care provider associations, such as the American Medical Association, the American Academy of Family Physicians, the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists and the Society for Adolescent Medicine, discuss family planning as preventive care as do well-respected public health advocates like the American Public Health Association and the March of Dimes.

As reproductive justice advocates, we know that ensuring women's unimpeded access to comprehensive contraceptive care would offer tremendous benefits to women and families. Women would no longer be forced to forego needed services because they can't afford them and wouldn't have to choose the cheapest form of contraception, rather than the one that best meets their current reproductive health needs. RWV also supports the inclusion of other important women's health services, like well-woman visits to a health care provider and screening for intimate partner violence.

### **What you can do**

Call Secretary Sebelius' office TODAY and tell her HHS guidelines **must address the full range of women's preventive health care needs**, including coverage of all contraceptive drugs and devices approved by the Food and Drug Administration, contraceptive services to provide those supplies and the counseling and patient education needed to use contraception safely and effectively.

You can reach her by email at [Healthreform@hhs.gov](mailto:Healthreform@hhs.gov) or by calling the Department of Health and Human Services at 1-202-205-5445.

Given the economic challenges we all are facing, we must ensure that no one forgoes preventive care because of the cost. Federal programs, scientific clinical guidelines, and all the evidence we have tells us contraceptive coverage is preventive care. As we implement health reform, we would be doing a great injustice if we didn't follow precedent and Congressional intent by ensuring that family planning services are treated like other preventive care.