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## Trump Administration Finalizes Dangerous Changes to Federal Family Planning Funding

Earlier this week, the Trump Administration published final rules for the [Title X Family Planning Program](#) (Title X) that threaten to dismantle access to reproductive and sexual health care services in communities across the country.

Title X is a federal grant program created to ensure access to comprehensive family planning and preventive health services. Organizations like Planned Parenthood use Title X funds to provide vital health care, including services relating to pregnancy, contraception, sexually transmitted infections, and cancer screening. The governing statute requires that program funds be used to serve low income populations by minimizing the costs of this type of care for them. It is therefore no surprise that Title X clinics are often the only source of preventive services for low-income women in both rural and medically underserved urban areas across the country. Title X serves approximately 4 million people annually—[78%](#) of Title X patients have incomes below 150% of the federal poverty level.

The new rule undermines this governing principle of enhancing access to care. Among other changes, the new rule will:

- Bar health care professionals at Title X-funded clinics from referring women for abortion care (contributing to the rule's moniker, "the gag rule");
- Prohibit Title X-funded clinics from sharing finances, staff, or a physical location with an abortion provider, establishing unnecessary separation requirements that are costly, if not impossible, for providers to comply with; and
- Eliminate the requirement that Title X providers offer pregnancy options counseling that includes information about abortion, thereby doing away with assurances of comprehensive and unbiased counseling.

These policies stand to restrict freedom of choice, compromise the patient-provider relationship, and shrink the network of providers that make affordable reproductive health care services available, including sexual health care and other preventive services providers.

The changes will not come into effect all at once. Some requirements will take effect within 60 days of the rule's publication in the *Federal Register* (i.e., some requirements take effect as early as May 3, 2019). Many changes, including the gag rule and financial separation requirements, take effect within 120 days (July 2, 2019). Providers have one year to comply with the physical separation requirements.

Advocates across the country—including individuals, advocacy organizations, professional associations, and government officials—spoke up loudly and sharply against the rule when the Administration first announced its proposed changes in May 2018. Hundreds of thousands of comments were submitted during the 60-day comment period. In the wake of the final rule's release, advocates rally once again.

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Democratic members of Congress sent a [letter](#) to the Office of Management and Budget and the Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs (executive-branch bodies that are [supposed](#) to provide oversight to the agency rulemaking process) raising serious concerns that the regulatory review process was deficient. The letter highlighted “troubling irregularities” including the uncharacteristically short period of review, the reported denial of stakeholder meeting requests, and the failure to conduct mandated analyses of the rule’s impact. We do not yet know how the Administration will respond to this scrutiny.

At the same time, California Attorney General Xavier Becerra and, separately, a [coalition of 20 states plus D.C.](#) have already filed lawsuits to block the final rule. Planned Parenthood and the American Medical Association filed a [lawsuit](#) today. Organizations such as the American Civil Liberties Union and the Center for Reproductive Rights have also announced that they will lead [lawsuits on behalf of family planning providers](#). If, despite the resistance, the rule goes into effect in May, we may ultimately see states and clinics [reject](#) Title X funding rather than deny women access to unbiased, comprehensive information. Instead, such organizations may either look to alternative sources of financing or be forced to contend with the [realities of fewer resources](#).

So steady yourselves, advocates! It is an unsettling development, but the fight over Title X is far from finished.

*Health Care in Motion is written by Robert Greenwald, Faculty Director; Kevin Costello, Litigation Director and Associate Director; Phil Waters, Clinical Fellow; Maryanne Tomazic, Clinical Fellow; and Rachel Landauer, Clinical Fellow.*

*For further questions or inquiries please contact us at [chlpi@law.harvard.edu](mailto:chlpi@law.harvard.edu).*

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