

WASHINGTON – Congresswoman Jan Schakowsky (IL-9), Congresswoman Lois Capps (CA-23), Congresswoman Rosa DeLauro (CT-3), and National Women’s Law Center (NWLC) Co-President Marcia D. Greenberger applaud the release of a report from the Institute of Medicine (IOM) advocating that contraception services, supplies, education and counseling – without cost-sharing requirements – be included as a preventive health service to be included in all new health insurance plans.

Signed into law last year, the ACA fundamentally changes the American health care system, shifting the focus away from reactive responses and towards prevention and wellness. All Americans will benefit from this change, but women especially as they live longer and have specific health care needs met that have traditionally been overlooked.

Capps submitted testimony to the IOM signed by 42 other members, including Congresswoman DeLauro and Congresswoman Schakowsky, in support of requiring that contraceptive services be included as a preventive health service in all new insurance plans. They cited a strong research base that shows the important health impacts of planning a pregnancy and proper birth spacing on both a woman and her children. For example, the ability to determine the timing of a pregnancy can prevent a range of pregnancy complications, including gestational diabetes, high blood pressure, and placental problems, among others. In addition, a planned pregnancy allows a woman to take steps so she is sufficiently healthy to undergo pregnancy and childbirth.

Planned, compared to unplanned, pregnancies also have improved outcomes for the health of children. Women who wait for some time after delivery before conceiving their next child lower their risk of adverse perinatal outcomes, including low birth weight, preterm birth, and small-for-size gestational age. Moreover, a planned pregnancy affords women an opportunity to make behavioral changes that have been shown to lead to better birth outcomes and help women enter prenatal care earlier.

Unfortunately, several studies indicate that costs—including co-payments and other cost-sharing requirements—play a key role in the contraceptive behavior of substantial numbers of U.S. women.

“These recommendations are the first step in providing relief to millions of American women and girls who are unable to afford the essential preventive services they need. As patients, caregivers, and as workers who still earn less than men, women have a particular stake in ensuring cost-sharing requirements do not prevent access to contraception and prevention. I am confident the Obama administration will continue the progress made in the Affordable Care

Act to improve women's health by assuring them the services they deserve and need," said Congresswoman Schakowsky.

"I am very pleased with the IOM's recommendations on closing the gaps in preventative services for women. For too long, women have had to pay more for their insurance coverage—just because we are women—and yet our health care needs have often been politicized. The IOM's recommendations break through those barriers and provide us with important recommendations, based on strong evidence and rigorous science. While this report does not, in its own right, ensure women will get the services they need, it is a critical first step to inform the Secretary of Health and Human Services of what should be considered women's preventative healthcare and included as preventive health care under the Affordable Care Act," said Congresswoman Capps. "Planning a pregnancy and proper birth spacing are critically important to ensure that both a woman and her children are as healthy as possible. However, especially in hard economic times like we are experiencing now, women and their partners often have to choose between high contraceptive costs and paying the bills. The IOM's recommendation to include all FDA contraceptive methods as a critical preventative service—without cost sharing—and to cover the patient education and counseling necessary to ensure each woman can choose the method best for her, is a critical step in empowering all women to plan their pregnancies."

"I commend the IOM and their work to interpret the ACA's clinical preventive care requirements for women, especially the inclusion of contraceptive methods, regular screenings for HPV, counseling and education for sexually active women, and annual 'well-woman' preventive care services," said Congresswoman DeLauro. "The passage of the Affordable Care Act was one of the proudest moments of my life—for over a year, many of my colleagues and I fought to ensure that the legislation would include specific health care benefits for women, expanding their access to care instead of restricting their choices. The recommendations in this study reflect that effort, and will ensure that for the first time, women are on equal footing with men when it comes to healthcare."

"The National Women's Law Center applauds the Institute of Medicine for identifying that contraception is essential preventive health care for women and should be covered by insurance with no out-of-pocket costs to women," said NWLC Co-President Marcia D. Greenberger. "The panel members brought their scientific and medical expertise to bear to identify the key elements of preventive health care necessary for women's health and well-being. As a result, women are one step closer to having access to affordable health care such as birth control and important preventive screenings. And the nation is one step closer to realizing the promise of the Affordable Care Act."

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