



# REPRODUCTIVE EQUITY NOW

## **Breaking Down Barriers to Birth Control: The Importance of the ACCESS Law**

Even with its imperfections, the Affordable Care Act was a remarkable leap forward for our country. Because of this landmark policy, millions of Americans have quality, affordable health insurance, and millions more feel secure in knowing they don't have to bankrupt themselves to afford basic care. The ACA created a seismic shift in the health care landscape. For women in particular, it brought about some of the greatest advances in health care access in a generation.

Fast forward seven years, we now face a cruel proposal that sets women's health care access back decades and makes it harder for families to thrive. If Speaker Ryan and President Trump are successful in their crusade to make America sick again, being a woman will once again be a pre-existing condition, resulting in sky-high premiums for "conditions" like having given birth, having had a C-section, or having survived domestic violence or sexual assault. Insurers will no longer be required to cover Essential Health Benefits like maternity and newborn care, or mental health services and prescription drugs--services more frequently used by women. While millions will pay more for less coverage, millions of others will lose subsidies that helped them afford coverage, or lose insurance completely as Medicaid is gutted and its expansion is ended. For those who get to stay on Medicaid, they will be prohibited from receiving preventive care at Planned Parenthood. Simply put, this bill imposes roadblocks between the American people and health care, blatantly ignoring the reality that fewer barriers to care empower people to stay healthy.

Now that House Republicans have taken the first step to enact these extremely dangerous policies, Massachusetts must acknowledge we aren't insulated from their devastating effects. While the Commonwealth is better positioned than many other states, the threats to our care are real. We must stay two steps ahead in Congressional Republicans' political game. Part of this is establishing state-level protections that maintain and expand the ACA's requirements. An Act Advancing Contraceptive Coverage and Economic Security in our State, or ACCESS, will do just that by codifying the ACA's guarantee that all birth control methods be available without copay. California, Maryland, Illinois, and Vermont already have similar laws. It's time Massachusetts follows suit.

Access to affordable contraception ensures every person can stay healthy and plan their future, regardless of their economic status. Contraception empowers people to plan if and when they have children and helps them stay healthy, enabling them to achieve their educational and professional goals. Birth control not only prevents unintended pregnancy, it contributes to healthier pregnancies and ultimately improves lives, the stability of families, and the well-being of children. These individual benefits have in turn bettered our society: [one third of wage gains made by women since the 1960s can be attributed to access to birth control pills](#).

The benefits of birth control are clear, but many will not be able to afford its benefits much longer given the uncertain fate of the ACA, the President's latest [Executive Order helping employers deny contraceptive coverage](#), and the frightening fact that Health and Human Services Secretary Tom Price can unilaterally repeal the regulations that defined birth control as preventive care. While some, including Secretary Price, have scoffed at the idea of cost barriers, women know better. A [recent poll](#) found 33 percent of women could not afford to pay more than \$10 for birth control. Birth control pills can cost up to \$600 a year and highly effective long-acting reversible contraceptives, such as IUDs, can cost up to \$1,000 up front. That's an enormous gap that will be impossible for many to fill.

Under the ACA, [more than 55 million women—including 1.4 million in Massachusetts--have access to no-copay birth control through private insurance](#), and 16.7 million women benefit from Medicaid coverage. Combined, women have saved \$1.4 billion a year on pills alone. These savings, and the personal, professional, and health gains made by women, are at risk.

Protecting reproductive health and rights requires advocates to fight federal attacks while also shielding Massachusetts residents from their consequences. By passing ACCESS, the legislature and Governor Baker can protect our state's ability to realize the ACA's full promise for women and families.

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