

Reproductive Health

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Description: The World Health Organization (WHO) describes Reproductive Health as “all matters relating to a person’s reproductive system and its functions and processes,” including the right to decide if to reproduce, when to reproduce, and how often to reproduce (World Health Organization 2022). Throughout the United States, restrictive policies have been enacted that limit one’s ability to access basic reproductive health services and care. These policies disproportionately target Black, indigenous, and people of color; those with lower incomes, immigrants, and people living in rural areas (American Public Health Association 2021). Reproductive health includes, but is not limited to affordable access to contraception, family planning, abortion, STI testing and treatment, LGBTQIA+ health, parental health, and adolescent health.

Policy Statement: VtPHA supports public health and health care systems that will be fully mobilized to promote reproductive health/justice, and access to high-quality systems regardless of ability to pay. We believe that access to reproductive services is at its core, a public health issue. Full access to reproductive health services should be accessible, comprehensive, and protected for all Vermonters to ensure the health of our communities.

Supported Actions:

We are at a time in our nation when people’s autonomy over their own reproductive health is under attack. Considering these threats to personal reproductive liberty, VtPHA supports:

- Protecting the rights of Vermonters to make their own reproductive choices.
- Become pregnant and carry a pregnancy to term
- Choose or refuse sterilization
- Choose abortion
- Choose or refuse contraception
- Protecting access to safe abortions, recognizing that 1 in 3 women will have an abortion in their lifetime (“Reproductive Freedom”).
- Maintaining and expanding affordable access to HPV vaccines (“The Legal Rights of Women in Vermont: Reproductive Rights”).
- Maintaining access to affordable contraceptives as provided by the Vermont Access to Birth Control Law (“Vermont Access to Birth Control Law”).
- Creating affordable solutions to receiving essential reproductive health care, recognizing that not all health insurance policies cover costs of abortion services, including policies offered by federal agencies in Vermont (“The Legal Rights of Women in Vermont: Reproductive Rights”).

Potential Barriers:

- Disparities in unmet family planning needs and health outcomes continue to persist among vulnerable population groups throughout the state - individuals with low

income; teens; individuals with mental health and/or substance abuse issues; LGBTQ+ population; racial and ethnic minorities; and incarcerated women (Vermont Department of Health 2015).

- Ensuring access to reproductive services in rural areas, due to obstacles with finances and staff recruitment and retention, e.g., some Planned Parenthood Northern New England (PPNNE) centers are small and do not have the resources to stay open enough hours to meet the needs of the area (Vermont Department of Health 2015).
- Social stigma against reproductive freedom, including uninhibited access to contraception and abortions
- Lack of public understanding of the unmet need for a full range of reproductive services in Vermont
- Difficulties in providing a full range of reproductive health services at health centers – i.e. funding limitations; hiring obstetricians/gynecologists, counselors, and clinicians; connecting patients to services not provided by the health center, and delivering services to underserved populations (Goldberg et al 2015).

Related Policies:

1. *Relevant APHA policies*

- APHA Policy 20153: Universal Access to Contraception
<https://www.apha.org/Policies-and-Advocacy/Public-Health-Policy-Statements/Policy-Database/2015/12/17/09/14/Universal-Access-to-Contraception>
- APHA Policy: The Need for State Legislation Protecting and Enhancing Women's Ability to Obtain Safe, Legal Abortion Services Without Delay or Government Interference
<https://www.apha.org/Policies-and-Advocacy/Public-Health-Policy-Statements/Policy-Database/2014/07/09/11/16/The-Need-for-State-Legislation-Protecting-Womens-Ability-to-Obtain-Safe-Legal-Abortion-Services>
- APHA Policy 20139: Renouncing the Adoption or Misapplication of Laws to Recognize Fetuses as Independent of Pregnant Women
<https://www.apha.org/Policies-and-Advocacy/Public-Health-Policy-Statements/Policy-Database/2014/07/14/14/03/Renouncing-Laws-to-Recognize-Fetuses-as-Independent-of-Pregnant-Women>
- APHA Policy 20143: Sexuality Education as Part of a Comprehensive Health Education Program in K to 12 Schools
<https://www.apha.org/Policies-and-Advocacy/Public-Health-Policy-Statements/Policy-Database/2015/01/23/09/37/Sexuality-Education-as-Part-of-a-Comprehensive-Health-Education-Program-in-K-to-12-Schools>
- APHA Policy 20152: Restricted Access to Abortion Violates Human Rights, Precludes Reproductive Justice, and Demands Public Health Intervention

<https://www.apha.org/Policies-and-Advocacy/Public-Health-Policy-Statements/Policy-Database/2016/01/04/11/24/Restricted-Access-to-Abortion-Violates-Human-Rights>

- APHA Policy 20130: Protecting Abortion Coverage in Health Reform

<https://www.apha.org/Policies-and-Advocacy/Public-Health-Policy-Statements/Policy-Database/2014/07/24/10/48/Protecting-Abortion-Coverage-in-Health-Reform>

- APHA Policy 202110: Opposing Coercion in Contraceptive Access and Care to Promote Reproductive Health Equity

<https://www.apha.org/Policies-and-Advocacy/Public-Health-Policy-Statements/Policy-Database/2022/01/07/Contraceptive-Access>

- APHA Policy 20217: Decriminalization of and Support for Self-Managed Abortion <https://www.apha.org/Policies-and-Advocacy/Public-Health-Policy-Statements/Policy-Database/2022/01/07/Decriminalization-of-and-Support-for-Self-Managed-Abortion>

- APHA Policy 202114: Improving the Role of Health Departments in Activities Related to Abortion

<https://www.apha.org/Policies-and-Advocacy/Public-Health-Policy-Statements/Policy-Database/2022/01/07/Improving-Health-Department-Role-in-Activities-Related-to-Abortion>

2. *Proposal 5: Senate Chamber Proposed Amendment to the Constitution of the State of Vermont, declaration of rights; right to personal reproductive liberty.*

3. *H. 620 Vermont Access to Birth Control Law - signed into law in 2016.*

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<https://legislature.vermont.gov/Documents/2022/Docs/BILLS/PR0005/PR0005%20As%20adopted%20by%20the%20Senate%20Official.pdf>

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