



HEALTH JUSTICE FOR WOMEN

Until the Affordable Care Act (ACA) women were not treated as equal to men in health care research, delivery, or insurance costs. Most scientific studies on health were conducted on men, although women respond differently to many drugs, and often require different solutions to meet their health care needs. Until the ACA, they paid more than men for health insurance and their unique needs were often ignored.

By the time of the Affordable Care Act in 2010 that inferior status was no longer acceptable. Twelve aware Democratic women senators helped write the law and build into its structure a carefully crafted design of equal treatment for women in health care. The Institute of Medicine (IOM) was charged with convening a committee of women's health experts who worked for six months to craft their report, "Closing the Gap." Among the eight additional services provided in all women's insurance policies at no added cost are breast-feeding counseling, diabetes screening at 24-28 weeks of gestation, domestic violence screening and counseling, and contraception counseling and services. The ACA does not provide any abortion services. However, separate private insurance policies are optional.

Over a hundred lawsuits have been filed by employers who claim a religious conviction against providing employees with contraceptive services. Insurance companies have agreed to absorb this cost so the employers are not involved. Yet some contend that even signing a waiver is an undue burden. The courts must ask how this "burden" compares with that of employees who need contraception, want to choose their method in consultation with their doctor, and may no longer have this covered by their insurance policies.

In the Hobby Lobby lawsuit the Supreme Court ruled five to four that a couple who owns the company and does not approve certain contraceptives can prevent thousands of their female employees from receiving free access to these services in their health insurance. Five conservative judges were more concerned with the religious rights of the two owners than with the health care rights of thousands of women. Four justices, including the three women on the court, cared about fairness to women. They felt the religious convictions of the owners should end where the health decisions of their employees begin.

There is indeed a "war against women." Republicans are leading the effort to deny contraceptive services to women in the ACA. They are closing Planned Parenthood clinics in red states across the country, depriving poor women of basic health care, contraceptive services and abortion counseling and care. **THE WAR ON WOMEN IS REAL. THEIR HEALTH HANGS IN THE BALANCE.**