



Expanding Contraceptive Access Through Federal Guidelines

Clinical and programmatic guidelines that are patient-centered, evidence-based, and up-to-date play a vital role in setting quality standards for contraceptive and reproductive health care across the country.

Reproductive health outcomes are directly impacted by where individuals receive family planning services, and how their care is delivered. New technologies, such as video, voice and app-based telehealth services, and personal preferences for accessing care are driving major changes in health care delivery. As new objective evidence becomes available, and innovations in care and delivery evolve, so must the guidelines that influence them.

Development and use of guidelines

Within the US Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), the Agency for Healthcare Quality and Research (AHRQ), Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS), Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion (ODPHP), and Office of Population Affairs (OPA) have all developed guidelines that impact the delivery of health care and access to specific services, including contraceptive services.

Two types of guidelines:



Clinical Practice Guidelines

Clinical Practice Guidelines are focused on **optimizing patient care and outcomes** on the individual and provider level and are key to improving the **quality and process of patient care**. According to the Institute of Medicine (IOM), “they are informed by a systematic review of evidence and an assessment of the benefits and harms of alternative care options.”



Programmatic and Public Health Guidelines

Programmatic Guidelines and public health guidelines are focused on **identifying interventions that impact health on the group, community, or other population level**. For instance, The Women’s Preventive Services Guidelines provide a set of evidence-based recommendations for a specific set of services to keep women healthy.

Application of guidelines

Both clinical and programmatic guidelines play a critical role in **establishing benchmarks, monitoring progress over time, and ensuring contraceptive care remains current** with the latest science and new innovations in health care delivery.

Objective and evidence-based federal guidelines for family planning services are important for health care providers, policymakers, and the public to navigate a changing healthcare landscape and make informed decisions concerning contraceptive care.

Challenges with guidelines that impact access to contraception

- A lack of focus on federal guidelines regarding contraceptive access has left a gap in high-quality standards for contraceptive care, impeding access to contraception and limiting important evidence-based information for the people who need it.
- There are currently no national recommendations for providing access to contraception as a basic clinical preventive service, reinforcing the perception that contraceptive care is “exceptional” and not a part of routine preventive health care.
- Efforts to develop clinical guidelines stall in years when sexual and reproductive health issues, including contraception, become more politicized.
- Guidelines require up-to-date research to maintain evidence-based and high-quality standards to be most effective on new service delivery platforms, such as telemedicine, and through new contraceptive delivery mechanisms.

Solutions to expand contraceptive access through federal guidelines

Guidelines that are rigorously developed and consistently adopted, implemented, and evaluated have the potential to improve both the quality of contraceptive care and patient outcomes. We can develop effective, evidence-based federal guidelines to set standards of care and expand contraceptive access by:

- **Creating a plan for a fully revised set of recommendations for quality family planning services.**
- **Effectively translating research into evidence-based policies and practices for dissemination and implementation.**
- **Establishing performance measures that emphasize the need to use the most rigorous standards to develop guidelines and ensure methods to develop guidelines are based on the best available science.**
- **Identifying new and innovative guidelines for expanding access even further.**

