Standing Up for Women & Families in 2017
A Legislative Agenda

The National Partnership for Women & Families is dedicated to expanding opportunities for women and improving the well-being and economic security of our nation’s families. For more than 45 years, we have promoted access to quality, affordable health care, reproductive health and rights, policies that help women and men meet the dual demands of work and family, and fairness in the workplace. Especially in times like these, which demand bold action, we vigorously defend against any measure that would harm women’s rights, health, equality and opportunity, and we mobilize other organizations and the public to do the same. Whether fighting harmful rollbacks of essential rights and protections or building on years of progress, the National Partnership is a leading force for women and families.

The National Partnership works to advance and defend women’s rights and opportunities because when women do better, families do better and our nation prospers. Women are mothers and daughters, caregivers and breadwinners, consumers and business owners, and the country needs policies and programs that address the complexities and realities we face in all aspects and at all stages of our lives. We fight for progress at the federal, state and local levels and work to block every attempt to roll back our rights, weaken our safety net or take our nation backward. When leaders seek to divide us, we unify people around policies that benefit women, families, communities, businesses, public health and our economy. We have a proud track record of winning meaningful, transformative change.

In 2017, we urge you to stand up for women and families by:

- Supporting Paid Sick Days, Paid Family and Medical Leave, and Expanded Access to the Family and Medical Leave Act, and Fighting Harmful Rollbacks
- Supporting Fair Pay for Women, Reasonable Workplace Accommodations for Pregnant Workers, Fair Scheduling, and an End to Employment Discrimination
› Supporting Quality, Affordable Child Care and a Secure Safety Net That Protects Women and Families, and Fighting Efforts to Limit the Retirement and Other Benefits Families Need

› Supporting Meaningful Access to and Coverage for Comprehensive Reproductive Health Care, Including Contraception and Abortion, and Fighting Every Effort to Undermine Women’s Ability to Make Their Own Health Care Decisions

› Advancing Quality, Affordable Health Care for All Women and Families by Protecting the Affordable Care Act (ACA), Medicaid and Medicare, Ensuring Health Reform Increases Access to Affordable, Comprehensive Coverage, and Promoting Innovations That Improve Care, Lower Costs and Reduce Disparities

› Supporting Policies and Programs to Improve Quality and Protect Access to Maternity Care

› Promoting a Fair and Diverse Judiciary

Essential Workplace Policies

It is past time for workplaces to reflect the realities of life for 21st century families. Innovation at the state and local levels should be replicated for all working people in the United States, no matter where they live or work or what job they hold. Efforts to undermine basic labor and civil rights and protections must be stopped.

› Support Paid Sick Days:

  More than 41 million private sector workers cannot earn a single paid sick day to recover from common, short-term illnesses.¹ This puts the health and economic stability of these workers and their families in jeopardy, and communities and businesses suffer. We urge Congress and the administration to:

  › Support the Healthy Families Act, which would establish a national paid sick days standard and allow workers to earn up to seven paid, job-protected sick days each year.

  › Oppose efforts to force workers to forego pay in exchange for inadequate “comp time” they cannot use to meet family needs. Legislation such as the Working Families Flexibility Act offers workers a pay cut in the short term without any guarantee that they can use banked time off when they need it.
Support Paid Family and Medical Leave Programs: A mere 14 percent of working people in the United States have access to paid family leave through their employers, and fewer than 40 percent have employer-provided, short-term disability insurance. Private sector progress is slow, uneven, and does not address the fact that, at some point, nearly all workers need time away from their jobs to deal with serious personal or family illness or to care for a new child. We urge Congress and the administration to:

- Support the Family And Medical Insurance Leave (FAMILY) Act, which would create a national paid leave insurance program to allow workers to earn a substantial portion of their pay while they take a limited amount of time away from their jobs for a range of important family and medical needs. It covers leave to: care for a newborn, newly adopted child or newly placed foster child; care for a family member with a serious health condition; address their own serious health condition; or manage certain military caregiving responsibilities.

- Support the Federal Employees Paid Parental Leave Act, which would allow federal employees who are eligible for up to 12 weeks of leave under the Family and Medical Leave Act to receive pay for up to six weeks of that time for the birth or adoption of a child.

- Oppose any federal paid family and medical leave proposal that does not apply to all workplaces across the nation, cover women and men equally, address a range of serious family and medical leave needs, and offer adequate benefits and employment protections that allow workers to use paid leave.

Expand the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA): The FMLA has been used by working people more than 200 million times, but about 40 percent of workers are ineligible for the unpaid leave it provides and it does not reflect the range of modern families’ needs or relationships. We urge Congress and the administration to:

- Support legislation that expands access to the FMLA to cover: workers in businesses with fewer than 50 employees; part-time workers; leave to care for additional family members, including domestic partners, parents-in-law, adult children, siblings, grandchildren and grandparents; and other uses for leave, including for children’s educational activities, elder care needs and bereavement.

- Oppose legislation that rolls back essential FMLA protections or makes FMLA leave more difficult to access.
Promote Fair Pay: Women employed full time, year-round are paid, on average, only 80 cents for every dollar paid to men. Black women are paid 63 cents and Latinas just 54 cents for every dollar paid to white, non-Hispanic men. White women are paid 75 cents for every dollar paid to white, non-Hispanic men. For Asian women, the gap is narrower, but still punishing. Asian women are paid 85 cents for every dollar paid to white, non-Hispanic men, but some subsets of Asian women are paid considerably less.\(^4\) In addition, women are nearly two-thirds of workers who are paid the federal minimum wage of just $7.25 per hour.\(^5\) We urge Congress and the administration to:

- Support the Paycheck Fairness Act, which would update and strengthen the Equal Pay Act by closing loopholes and improving the law’s effectiveness. The Paycheck Fairness Act would make it harder for employers to hide pay discrimination or retaliate against workers who speak up, reward employers that have good pay practices and help train women and girls in salary negotiation.

- Support the Raise the Wage Act, which would substantially increase the federal minimum wage and eliminate the tipped minimum wage.

- Provide adequate funding for the Department of Labor and the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission to support data collection, investigations and enforcement of federal laws that promote fair pay.

- Oppose any proposal that only pays lip service to strengthening fair pay laws without providing women new tools to identify or remedy pay discrimination, and oppose efforts to undermine essential labor and civil rights protections.

- Oppose rollbacks of updates to the overtime salary threshold in the Fair Labor Standards Act.

Protect Pregnant Workers: Despite existing protections, pregnant workers in this country still face discrimination. Too often, pregnant workers are forced out of their jobs and denied reasonable accommodations that would enable them to continue working and supporting their families. We urge Congress and the administration to:

- Support the Pregnant Workers Fairness Act, which would help ensure pregnant women have equal access to reasonable workplace accommodations and promote the health and economic security of pregnant women and their families.
Oppose funding cuts to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, which would substantially impair the agency’s ability to investigate and enforce protections against pregnancy discrimination.

**Support Fair and Predictable Schedules:** When workers do not know when they are scheduled to work, or for how many hours, it can be nearly impossible to manage basic expenses, arrange for child care, continue their education, get a second job or pursue job training. Two-in-five workers early in their careers (41 percent) report learning their work schedules with only one week’s notice or less. We urge Congress and the administration to:

- Support the Schedules That Work Act, which would establish national fair scheduling standards that give workers more control over their schedules and offer them predictability and stability in shifts and work hours.

**Invest in Quality, Affordable Child Care and Early Learning:**
Most young children grow up in families where either a sole parent or both parents work outside the home. Quality, affordable child care is essential for parents to be able to succeed and advance at their jobs; it also is essential for children, whose early learning experiences affect education and development for years to come. The United States needs to vastly improve access to affordable, high-quality child care and substantially invest in the child care workforce. To start, we urge Congress and the administration to:

- Increase funding for the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) so that child care is more widely available for all low- and moderate-income families who need it and child care providers are better trained and compensated.

- Expand the Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit (CDCTC) by making it refundable for families without federal tax liability, increasing the share of expenses that families can claim, increasing the maximum credit to bring it closer to families’ actual child care expenses and improving coordination with other tax credit programs that help working families.

- Make child care investments part of a comprehensive infrastructure bill because high-quality child care is a vital part of our national infrastructure and is essential for parents to be able to participate in the new jobs that will help build our economy.
Oppose any child care proposal that diminishes quality and safety standards; eliminates or reduces funding for low- and middle-income families; relies on business tax credits to improve the availability of care; or relies solely on employee savings accounts to make child care more affordable.

**Strengthen Retirement Security:** Social Security is the largest source of retirement income for most seniors and especially women, helping millions pay for food, housing, prescription drugs and other necessities. No other guaranteed wage replacement program, public or private, offers the same level of economic security. Social Security should be strengthened, not cut. We urge Congress and the administration to:

- Support legislation that would help ensure workers who must take time out of the paid workforce to care for a family member are not penalized for lost wages when it comes time to draw Social Security retirement benefits.
- Make wealthy Americans pay their fair share into the Social Security trust fund by raising the cap, so everyone in this country can retire with the dignity and respect they deserve.
- Oppose cuts to the Social Security Administration’s operating budget, which will result in increased wait times and a deterioration of services.

**Reproductive Health and Rights**

Women’s economic security, equity and dignity are inextricably tied to their ability to plan whether and when to have children. Access to reproductive health care allows women to pursue education, hold jobs, support their families, achieve economic security and function as equal members of society. Now more than ever, access is under threat. Barriers continue to be erected that block access to abortion care, especially for women of color, young women, immigrants and LGBTQ individuals. Immigrant communities, increasingly targeted for harassment and deportation, are being forced to forgo health care as authorities target health clinics. Insurance coverage for contraception and other vital services is on the chopping block. Trusted reproductive health care providers work every day under threat of violence, harassment, or being defunded or shut down. Science and evidence – which should undergird health care policy – are being ignored and subverted.
Meaningful access to reproductive health care must be enhanced and every attack on abortion, contraception and information about sexual and reproductive health must be opposed, if women and families are to thrive.

- **Ensure That All Women Have Real Access to Abortion Care:** Abortion is an essential component of women’s reproductive health care, and access to it is vital to women’s health, equality and economic security. Women who seek and are denied abortion care are more likely to fall into poverty than women who obtain the care they need; when women are able to make their own decisions about pregnancy, their dignity and well-being are enhanced. Abortion care must be accessible and free of shame or stigma for all women, regardless of where they live, how much money they make, or where they get their health insurance. Access must be *expanded*, not diminished. We urge Congress and the administration to:

  - Support the **EACH Woman Act**, which would restore abortion coverage for women enrolled in Medicaid and other government-managed health programs, currently prohibited by the Hyde Amendment and similar restrictions. It would also prohibit laws that restrict private health insurance coverage of abortion care.
  
  - Support the **Women’s Health Protection Act**, which would combat the onslaught of state abortion restrictions that push abortion care out of reach and undermine the practice of medicine.
  
  - Oppose attempts to restrict coverage for abortion care, and oppose every attempt to expand, reiterate or codify the harmful and discriminatory Hyde Amendment.
  
  - Oppose every effort to undermine access to abortion care, including proposals that would: increase barriers for specific populations, such as women of color, immigrant women, young women, low-income women, LGBTQ individuals, or incarcerated women; place unconstitutional bans on abortion; increase barriers for health care providers seeking abortion training; or use religion or personal beliefs to discriminate by denying access to or information about care.

- **Ensure Access to Affordable, Effective Contraception:** Contraception does much more than prevent unintended pregnancies; it improves birth outcomes by promoting healthy birth spacing, allows women to plan if and when to become parents and enhances families’ economic security. The ability to use contraception to plan and space
pregnancies enables women to pursue education and career advancement. By contrast, barriers to contraception can undermine women’s health, financial stability, educational opportunities and workforce participation. We urge Congress and the administration to:

- Oppose efforts to undermine the Affordable Care Act’s coverage of women’s preventive services, including guaranteed coverage of all contraceptive methods approved by the Food and Drug Administration and counseling without cost sharing – a landmark advance for women’s health.

- Strengthen our nation’s family planning safety net by providing robust funding for the Title X Program and opposing efforts to dismantle or restructure Medicaid, which accounts for 75 percent of public dollars spent on family planning.8

- Oppose religious refusal provisions that allow health plans, medical institutions, employers or others to deny women access to contraceptive coverage and services.

### Protect and Enhance the Reproductive Health Care Infrastructure and Workforce:
High-quality reproductive health care is essential to women’s well-being. Increasingly, however, the reproductive health infrastructure is being undermined. Efforts to defund Planned Parenthood from Medicaid and other important health programs continue, despite the fact that Planned Parenthood is the trusted provider of choice for millions of people and is unparalleled in its ability to meet preventive, contraceptive and primary care needs for low-income women. Violence, threats and harassment against abortion providers and clinics are pervasive. At the same time, not enough clinicians have access to training in abortion care. We urge Congress and the administration to:

- Oppose every effort to defund Planned Parenthood, which would deny 2.5 million people access to essential health services such as cancer screenings, sexually-transmitted infection screenings and treatment, and birth control.

- Support efforts to expand abortion training for clinicians, because access to quality abortion care hinges on the availability of trained abortion providers.

- Raise awareness of harassment and threats against abortion providers and clinics and support efforts to prioritize the investigation and prosecution of those who commit or threaten violence against reproductive health care providers, patients or staff.
Ensure That Religion is Not Used to Discriminate: Increasingly, religion is being used to justify discrimination against women and families – in health care settings, in the workplace and in our communities. We all have the right to our religious beliefs, but not to impose those beliefs on others. Regardless of where we work or live, we should all be able to access the health care we need without shame, stigma or unnecessary barriers. We urge Congress and the administration to:

- Oppose all efforts to use religion to withhold health care, diminish equal rights for LGBTQ individuals, or otherwise undermine civil rights and safety protections.
- Support efforts to limit religious exemptions for laws that advance equality, health or safety, and to undo the harm caused by the U.S. Supreme Court’s damaging decision in *Hobby Lobby v. Burwell*.

Support Comprehensive Sex Education for Young People: Investing in comprehensive sexuality education improves public health and equips young people with the knowledge and tools they need to make informed decisions about their health and personal relationships. We urge Congress and the administration to:

- Support efforts to increase access to medically accurate, comprehensive sex education that is free from gender stereotypes and inclusive of the needs of young people, regardless of sexual orientation and gender identity. It should provide the information and skills necessary to make informed, responsible and healthy decisions to promote healthy sexuality and reduce unintended pregnancy, intimate partner violence and sexually transmitted infections, including HIV.
- Provide robust funding for the Teen Pregnancy Prevention Program, the Personal Responsibility Education Program and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Division of Adolescent and School Health.
- Oppose funding for abstinence-only education programs.

Quality, Affordable Health Care

All people deserve access to quality, affordable health care. This is essential for women and families to be economically secure and fully contribute to our society. In recent years, the country has made extraordinary progress in expanding health coverage and
ensuring that it is more affordable as well as comprehensive enough to meet the needs of all people, regardless of their gender, health status or sociodemographic background.

The Affordable Care Act (ACA) heralded a historic advance for women’s health by ensuring equitable access to coverage and guaranteeing services essential to women, including family planning and maternity care. Due to the ACA, the country has also made important strides in improving the overall quality of care and containing escalating costs. The law has promoted better coordinated and more patient-centered care that, over time, will yield lower costs, less burden and better health outcomes for women and families.

We urgently need to build on this progress, not reverse these trends by taking away coverage, making it less affordable or eliminating protections in ways that once again allow insurers to pick and choose who and what they will cover and how much they will charge, thereby pricing millions of women and families out of the care they need.

- **Protect the Affordable Care Act (ACA) and Continue Investing in and Improving Access to Health Care Coverage and High-Quality, High-Value Health Care:** The ACA is the greatest advance for women’s health in a generation. We urge Congress and the administration to:
  - Protect the ACA and oppose every attempt to repeal this essential law, in whole or in part.
  - Ensure that health reforms build on the ACA and result in increased access to affordable, quality, comprehensive coverage.
  - Maintain coverage of essential health care benefits in private and public insurance programs, including preventive care, maternity and newborn care, services for mental health and substance abuse disorders, prescription drugs and other essential care.
  - Support adequate resources for implementation of the ACA (including cost-sharing reductions) and for all agency administration and enforcement, including enrollment.
Oppose policies that would weaken coverage protections for women, such as eliminating requirements for certain types of essential care (e.g., making maternity coverage optional), weakening protections for women with pre-existing conditions, allowing insurance companies to charge higher premiums to women, selling health insurance across state lines, establishing high-risk pools, relying on Health Savings Accounts and imposing continuous coverage requirements.

Advocate for robust implementation and enforcement of Section 1557 of the ACA, which prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, age and disability in federally funded health programs or activities. Oppose any attempts to undermine or limit Section 1557’s application in the insurance market or provision of health services.

Support innovation in ways to pay for and deliver health care in order to promote higher quality care, increased coordination and lower costs. Ensure that new Medicare and Medicaid approaches to providing care and managing costs adequately address the specific health care needs of women as patients, decision-makers and family caregivers.

Support funding for quality measure development and multi-stakeholder endorsement of measures used in Medicare and Medicaid. Promote better measurement to evaluate how well providers and new models of care are performing. Increase use of measurement derived from patient-reported outcomes and care experience in order to assess whether new payment models are meeting the needs of women and families, especially those who are most at risk.

Support improvements in use of health information technology (HIT). Promote effective use of HIT to support: patients’ access to their own health information; improved care quality and coordination; improved communication and patient engagement; reduced waste, burden, harm and costs; and support for effective implementation of the 21st Century Cures Act.

Protect Medicaid’s Safety Net: Without Medicaid, millions of women, men and children would be without access to health care services and millions of older women and men would be without access to long-term care. We urge Congress and the administration to:

- Oppose every effort to block grant Medicaid, cut funds, or impose a per capita cap.
Resist policies that would reduce federal obligations or arbitrarily shift costs to states or to Medicaid enrollees.

Oppose policies that create barriers to eligibility or diminish access to needed services.

Actively promote Medicaid expansion and support Medicaid enrollment efforts.

Support the introduction of innovative new models of care delivery in Medicaid that ensure the provision of high-quality, patient- and family-centered care. Promote the transition toward value-based payment models that link provider payment to better care, better outcomes and cost-effectiveness.

Promote the continued expansion of Medicaid family planning services through the Medicaid state plan amendment process and oppose all attempts to undercut family planning services provided through Medicaid.

Protect Medicare’s Promise for Women and Oppose Efforts to Privatize or Undermine the Medicare Program: Medicare is the primary source of health care and the lynchpin of financial independence for millions of older women and women with disabilities. Any changes to Medicare must maintain the guarantee of affordable, quality coverage and make the program stronger for current and future generations. We urge Congress and the administration to:

Oppose policies that would undercut Medicare’s social insurance compact, such as premium vouchers or means-testing.

Oppose policies that delay access to Medicare, such as raising the age of eligibility.

Oppose attempts to shift additional financial burdens to Medicare beneficiaries through excessive out-of-pocket costs such as copays for needed services.

Promote the transition to value-based provider payment models that link payment to care quality, outcomes and cost. Advocates for women and families should participate in the design of new Medicare payment approaches, including implementation of the Medicare Access and CHIP Reauthorization Act (MACRA).

Foster Needed Improvements and Protect Access to Maternity Care: Maternal-newborn care can help give babies a healthy start and enhance the well-being
of mothers. Tens of billions of dollars are spent on these services in the United States each year – much of it Medicaid dollars – but much can and should be done to improve this care and to end persistent disparities. We need to increase use of evidence-based maternity care practices, reduce unnecessary medical interventions that sometimes harm women and newborns and rack up costs, and reliably provide beneficial services that are currently underused. Further, we must protect access to coverage and availability of maternal-newborn services in private insurance coverage and in Medicaid, which covers nearly half of the nation’s births. We urge Congress and the administration to:

- Support the Quality Care for Moms and Babies Act, which would increase state, regional and community-based quality improvement activities and establish a core set of much-needed quality measures in Medicaid and in the Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP).

- Support the Preventing Maternal Deaths Act, which would help states establish or support Maternal Mortality Review Committees to investigate and identify ways to prevent maternal deaths, improve maternal outcomes and reduce disparities.

- Support the Improving Access to Maternity Care Act, which would identify areas with maternity care provider shortages and enable the National Health Service Corps to deploy providers where they are needed most.

- Advance improvements in Medicaid and private sector payment and care models, including increased use of high-performing midwifery and birth center models of care, and coverage of doula services. Support development of measures based on women’s self-reported experience of maternity care and outcomes.

A Fair and Diverse Judiciary

The federal courts are critical to protecting women’s rights and, now more than ever, a fair, diverse and independent judiciary is a critical safeguard against actions that infringe on fundamental rights and protections.

- Prioritize Confirmation of Qualified Judges With a Demonstrated Commitment to Equal Justice at Every Level of the Federal Judiciary:

Appointed for life, the decisions made by federal judges and justices will affect women and families for decades to come. We urge the Senate and the
administration to:

- Nominate and confirm qualified judges to fill all vacancies, focusing on individuals who increase diversity and whose records demonstrate that they understand the separation of powers and limits of executive authority, as well as the needs of women and families, including access to abortion and contraceptive services, fair pay, family and medical leave, comprehensive health care, and the ability to compete equally in workplaces and live free of discrimination.

- Oppose the nomination and confirmation of judges whose records demonstrate disregard for the rights of women, workers, people of color, immigrants, LGBTQ individuals and all people who face discrimination, and for the protections and limits required by statutes and the constitution that safeguard our civil rights and liberties.


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Get to Know the National Partnership for Women & Families

We believe that actions speak louder than words. For more than four decades, we have fought for every major policy advance that has helped women and families.

Today, we promote fairness in the workplace, reproductive health and rights, access to quality, affordable health care, and policies that help women and men meet the dual demands of work and family.

Founded in 1971 as the Women’s Legal Defense Fund, the National Partnership for Women & Families is a nonprofit, nonpartisan 501(c)(3) organization located in Washington, D.C.

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