



Policy Position: Sexual and Reproductive Access to Care

Hawai'i Public Health Institute (HIPHI) supports policies that increase access and improve health outcomes for all people. These policies include those that support and expand access to all healthcare and healthcare procedures. According to the United Nations Population Fund, good sexual and reproductive health is a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being in all matters relating to the reproductive system.¹

On June 24, 2022, the U.S. Supreme Court stripped away the rights of millions of women and people who can get pregnant to have safe and legal abortions, shifting that power back to the states. This action imperils safe abortion, profoundly sets back long-standing and hard-fought rights, and has broad impact on social determinants of health.² This action increases racial and economic disparities in reproductive health, maternal mortality, and infant mortality. It also greatly impacts individuals' ability to safely access medical care in a timely manner.

Access to skilled health care providers and all necessary healthcare procedures and services allow people to have fit pregnancies, safe births, and healthy babies. Therefore, HIPHI affirms to guiding principles and policy priorities to shape our decisions as we work to advance public policy in the area of sexual and reproductive health rights and justice.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- Commitment to a society, community, and family where all people are able to access healthcare.
- Belief that the ability to make decisions about pregnancy, childbearing, and childrearing is fundamental to equality of women and all people who can become pregnant and is an essential part of a just and equitable society.*
- Recognition that reproductive health and justice impacts not only individuals but the broader determinants of societal stability and cohesiveness; communities are improved when people can maintain personal bodily autonomy.
- Recognition that medication abortions, also known as abortion pills, are a safe, private, and accessible option for many people seeking abortion.³
- Recognition that even where abortion is legal, many people are not able to access surgical abortion due to cost or inability to travel to the nearest clinic, which may be on a different island.
- Commitment to ensuring that all people have a right to privacy when making decisions that determine their health, well-being, and their future.
- Commitment to ensuring universal, affordable, private and convenient access to all forms of contraceptive care and comprehensive sexual health education are available to all.

* The use of the term 'women and all people who can become pregnant' is a recognized best practice within the field of sexual and reproductive health, rights and justice. Specifically, leading organizations including, but not limited to, Guttmacher Institute, the National Women's Law Center, and the ACLU (among others) have adopted this terminology or similar language to ensure inclusivity and fully acknowledge the human and lived experience of individuals who can become pregnant including many cisgender women, some non-binary people, some intersex people, some Two Spirit people, and some trans men.

POLICY PRIORITIES

Medically accurate information and healthcare

- Provide pregnant individuals with access to accurate information.
- Ensure that when people decide to have children, they have access to skilled healthcare providers and services that can help them have a fit pregnancy, safe birth, and healthy baby.

Protections

- Ensure access to medical care that can reduce impact of life-threatening and problematic pregnancies, including ectopic pregnancies, miscarriage, and similar medical needs.
- Ensure chance of recovery from the psychological and physical trauma of sexual violence, including pregnancy as a result of rape or incest.⁴
- Protect and expand access to the full range of reproductive healthcare services, including actions to enhance family planning services and increase provider training.
- Ensure and protect the right to unrestricted free movement and travel to access comprehensive reproductive health services.
- Protect abortion providers, including pharmacists, and those seeking contraception, abortion, and other reproductive health services, from criminalization or prosecution.
- Ensure access to skilled healthcare providers and services that can help women and other birthing people have a safe pregnancy and birth, and healthy baby.
- Ensure that income and affordability are not barriers to access and self-management of care.
- Ensure publicly funded and private health insurance policies offer universal coverage for contraceptive and abortion services.
- Ensure the right to privacy of all people to make decisions around their health and well being.⁵

Underlying social determinants

- Address underlying social determinants, including poverty, systemic racism, and access to education and good nutrition, that place populations, including underserved populations, young people, and others at increased risk of maternal and infant mortality and other adverse health outcomes.⁶
- Commitment to ensuring gender equality.

RATIONALE

Maternal mortality

The U.S. maternal mortality rate is higher than in comparable developed nations and has worsened in recent years. According to the CDC, in 2020 the maternal mortality rate in the U.S. was 23.8 deaths per 100,000 live births.⁷ In Hawai'i, many rural communities have limited access to services, including subspecialty care for medically complex conditions.

In Hawai'i from 2015-2017, there were 25 cases of maternal mortality that underwent review.

- 52% of the deaths were on O'ahu.
- 48% of the deaths were on neighbor islands (Hawai'i, Kaua'i, and Maui).
- 44% of deaths occurred in Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander (NHOPI) women.
- 32% in Asian women.
- 24% in all other races.

For comparison, in 2015, the racial demographics of women in Hawai'i was 22% NHOPI, 38% Asian, and 21% white. Almost two-thirds of deaths (64%) occurred in women less than 34 years.

Socioeconomic impacts

- Data collected from the UC San Francisco 'Turnaway Study' reveal that the women who received abortions for unwanted pregnancies experienced significantly lower rates of poverty and were less reliant on public assistance in the five years following their abortion.⁸
- Women's participation in the workforce increases with access to healthcare which includes abortion access.⁹
- Abortion access reduced teen pregnancy, particularly for Black women who had lower levels of access to contraception. This allowed Black women greater opportunity to pursue further education.¹⁰

LGBTQ+ and gender rights

- Transgender and nonbinary people often face the greatest barriers to accessing care, including financial struggles, a lower rate of medical insurance, and anti-trans discrimination at the doctor's office.¹¹
- Nineteen percent of trans and nonbinary people attempt abortion on their own, a much higher rate than the 7% of cis women.¹²

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Hawai'i Public Health Institute (HIPHI) establishes internal public policy positions on priority topics and issue areas to help determine legislative and advocacy actions HIPHI may take. These priority areas also help to determine programmatic and/or organizational response. Developed by staff and approved by the Board of Directors, the public policy positions are policy documents to guide the organization over the long term as we work to influence the broader public policy landscape.

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