



T E X A S
Women's Healthcare
COALITION

**Senate Committee on Health and Human Services
Testimony of the Texas Women's Healthcare Coalition
September 13, 2016**

The Texas Women's Healthcare Coalition (TWHC) and its 64 healthcare, faith, and community-based member organizations are dedicated to improving the health and well-being of Texas women, babies, and families by ensuring access to preventive healthcare for all Texas women. Access to preventive and preconception care—including health screenings and contraception—means healthy, planned pregnancies and early detection of cancers and other treatable conditions.

TWHC commends the Legislature for its commitment to women's preventive healthcare. Building upon funding in 2013, the 84th Legislature's investment of an additional \$50 million for women's health services will go a long way towards ensuring women throughout the state have access to crucial preventive services. The TWHC also thanks the Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) for its efforts launching Healthy Texas Women and the Family Planning Program. Though work remains to ensure their success, these programs represent an important opportunity to serve thousands of women across Texas who are in need of basic health screenings and preventive care.

As the Committee considers its charge concerning the consolidation of women's health programs, the TWHC would like to emphasize the urgency of strengthening women's preventive healthcare, including contraception, across the state.

Recent developments in Texas underscore the importance of the state's women's health safety net clinics and services. Two recent reports have found an alarming spike in maternal mortality in Texas, with black women particularly at risk.¹ Increasing access to preventive care for low-income women before, during, and after pregnancy is an essential component of addressing this trend.

In addition, Texas is primed for local transmission of the Zika virus. Our wet spring has

created mosquito-friendly conditions, especially in vulnerable communities in South Texas, the Gulf Coast, and the Rio Grande Valley, as well as urban areas like Dallas County. Because of the devastating impact the Zika virus can have on pregnant women and their fetuses, strategies to prevent unintended pregnancies are critical in combatting the potential spread of Zika. Given this context, it is more important than ever to ensure that women across Texas have access to high quality preventive health services.

Continued investment in family planning is critical, particularly as providers and clients adjust to the introduction of the state's new programs. Stability in our state's program is essential if Texas hopes to strengthen its family planning network and reach the nearly 1.8 million Texas women in need of basic preventive services.² Below are recommendations for how Texas can strengthen its healthcare safety net and increase access to preventive care.

Recommendations

- 1. Identify areas with a shortage of qualified family planning providers and develop strategies to ensure robust provider participation.** As the state monitors the launch of its new programs, it will be particularly important to track provider capacity and identify ways to build upon the existing network. Texas can address the issue in a number of ways:
 - Ensure timely monitoring and data collection on provider capacity in the state to ensure all women, particularly those in rural areas and underserved populations, are able to access services;
 - Increase provider outreach and eliminate barriers preventing qualified providers from enrolling and providing services;
 - Increase payment rates for providers.

- 2. Increase access to contraception for Texas women, including the most effective, long-lasting forms (implants and intrauterine devices).** Texas must take every step to enable women to access the form of birth control they prefer, including long-acting reversible contraception (LARC) such as implants and IUDs. These forms of contraception are twenty times more effective than other methods, and are considered a first-line choice for women by medical organizations. However, their high upfront cost can be a barrier to providing them. The state has already taken important steps to increase access to LARCs, but more can be done:
 - Increase provider training and education on long acting reversible contraception, including training that specifically targets immediate postpartum insertion of LARCs;

- Increase outreach to educate Texas women about LARCs;
 - Regularly review and adjust payments for LARCs purchased directly by physicians or clinics to ensure women can obtain the device during an office visit rather than returning later when the device is ordered from a specialty pharmacy;
 - Enable CHIP Perinate to cover immediate postpartum insertion of LARCs.
3. **Further clarify which diagnosis codes are covered in Healthy Texas Women.** A list of diagnosis codes for HTW has not yet been published in the Texas Medicaid Provider Procedures Manual (TMPPM). This has led to confusion among some providers around which codes are allowable, and has led to denials for certain claims. Publishing a list of diagnosis codes in the TMPPM will enable providers to better serve women and avoid costly claim denials.
 4. **Better integrate family planning into the state's strategy to combat Zika.** In Texas, nearly half of all pregnancies are unintended.³ Because of the devastating impact the Zika virus can have on pregnant women and their fetuses, strategies to prevent unintended pregnancies are critical in combatting the potential spread of Zika. The state's decision to cover mosquito repellent in Medicaid, Healthy Texas Women, and other state programs was an important step. As Texas coordinates its state and local efforts to confront the Zika virus, state leaders must ensure that strengthening the family planning safety net is part of its strategy.
 5. **Improve continuity of care for young adults by auto-enrolling eligible 19-year-olds in Children's Medicaid and CHIP into the Healthy Texas Women Program.** Texas can ensure there is no gap in health coverage for women exiting CHIP and Children's Medicaid by automatically enrolling them into HTW at the end of their certification period.
 6. **Address technological glitches in the state's eligibility and enrollment system that prevent currently eligible clients from accessing family planning services.** Texas CHIP does not cover contraceptive services for its clients. Additionally, CHIP clients cannot receive contraceptive services through the Healthy Texas Women program because the HTW system (based on the Texas Integrated Eligibility Redesign System) is not currently designed to accept CHIP enrollees. As a result, eligible CHIP clients are unable to access contraceptive services through either program. This technological glitch within TIERS substantially undermines the benefits of having HTW serve some teenagers. With the highest rate of repeat teen pregnancy in the country, Texas has an opportunity to substantially decrease the likelihood of unintended pregnancies by

enabling more teens to access contraceptive services through the new HTW program. HHSC should prioritize changes to the TIERS system that would enable it to accept HTW clients who are enrolled in CHIP.

- 7. Maximize the ability of the women's healthcare safety net to reach more women and save Texas taxpayer dollars.** Medicaid currently covers only a small proportion of women of child-bearing age, including those who would be particularly vulnerable to the effects of Zika. Texas has the highest rate of uninsured people in the country.⁴ Developing a workable solution for the coverage gap will increase the number of women able to access a medical home where they can receive critical preventive care and family planning services.

Thank you for your consideration, and for your commitment to improving the lives of women and families in Texas. If you have any questions or we can provide further information, please contact Janet Realini at JRealini@TexasWHC.org.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Janet P. Realini MD MPH". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Janet P. Realini, MD, MPH
Steering Committee Chair, Texas Women's Healthcare Coalition

Texas Women's Healthcare Coalition Steering Committee Members

Texas Medical Association
 District XI (Texas) American Congress of Obstetricians and Gynecologists
 Texas Academy of Family Physicians
 Texas Association of Community Health Centers
 Methodist Healthcare Ministries
 Teaching Hospitals of Texas
 Women's Health and Family Planning Association of Texas
 Texans Care for Children
 Center for Public Policy Priorities
 Healthy Futures of Texas

Texas Women's Healthcare Coalition General Members

Access Esperanza Clinics Inc.	National Latina Institute for Reproductive Health
Amistad Community Health Center	North Harris Montgomery Advanced Practice Nurse Society
Austin Advanced Practice Nurses	North Texas Alliance to Reduce Teen Pregnancy
Austin Physicians for Social Responsibility	North Texas Nurse Practitioners
AWHONN Texas	Panhandle Nurse Practitioner Association
Brazos Valley Nurse Practitioner Association	People's Community Clinic
Cardea	Port Arthur Housing Authority
Center for Community Health, UNTHSC	SALVERE (Striving to Achieve Literacy via Education, Research, and Engagement)
Central Texas Nurse Practitioners	San Antonio Metropolitan Health District
Children's Hospital Association of Texas	San Antonio Nurses in Advanced Practice
Coalition for Nurses in Advanced Practice	Schneider Communications
Coastal Bend Advanced Practice Nurses	South Plains Nurse Practitioner Association
Consortium of Texas Certified Nurse Midwives	South Texas Family Planning & Health Corp.
Department of Ob/Gyn of UNTHSC and the ForHER Institute	Southeast Texas Nurse Practitioner Associates
El Paso Area Advanced Practice Nurse Association	St. David's Foundation
Fort Worth Region Nurse Practitioners	Texas Association of Obstetricians and Gynecologists
Gateway to Care	Texas Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy
Good Neighbor Health Center	Texas Council on Family Violence
Healthy Futures Alliance	Texas Health Institute
Hill Country Advanced Practice Nurses & Physicians	Texas Hospital Association
Assistants Association	Texas Medical Association Alliance
Houston Area Chapter of NAPNAP	Texas Nurse Practitioners
Houston Area Nurse Practitioners	Texas Nurses Association
League of Women Voters of Texas	Texas Pediatric Society
Legacy Community Health Services	Texas Unitarian Universalist Justice Ministry
March of Dimes - Texas	University Health System
Mental Health America of Greater Houston	Women's & Men's Health Services of the Coastal Bend, Inc.
National Council of Jewish Women—Texas State Policy Advocacy Network	

¹ MacDorman et al., “Recent Increases in the U.S. Maternal Mortality Rate: Disentangling Trends from Measurement Issues.” *Obstetrics & Gynecology*. 128(3). September 2016.; Texas Department of State Health Services. “Maternal Mortality and Morbidity Task Force and Department of State Health Services Joint Biennial Report.” July 2016. Accessed at <http://dshs.texas.gov/ConsumerandExternalAffairs/legislative/2016Reports/M3TFBiennialReport2016-7-15.pdf>.

² Frost J et al. “Contraceptive Needs and Services, 2013 Update,” Guttmacher Institute, 2015.

³ Delgado, E. & French, L. “Presentation to the House Committee on Public Health: Better Birth Outcomes.” Texas Health and Human Services System. Accessed at <http://www.hhsc.state.tx.us/news/presentations/2016/051916-Presentation-bbo.pdf>, June 13, 2016.

⁴ Cohen R, et al., “Health Insurance Coverage: Early Release of Estimates from the National Health Interview Survey, 2015.” Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. May 2016.