

Women Declare “My Health Matters”



by Jean Bucaria
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A young woman talks about needing birth control to stop the growth of painful ovarian cysts that could become cancerous. A college student says she depends on her local clinic for contraception, because she's not ready for kids. A thirty-something woman who wants to start a family is scared that her insurance won't cover her for an abortion if she experiences unexpected pregnancy complications. All of these women have joined the [My Health Matters](#) campaign, by simply uploading their own story to [YouTube](#) and using “My Health Matters” as part of the video's title.

The National Organization for Women's NYC service and educational arm, The Service Fund of NOW-NYC, is launching the campaign and urging people to tell their stories, to fight the slew of [anti-woman bills being introduced in Congress](#). We are aiming to generate an outpouring of videos that will make the irrefutable case for women's health. The videos contain real stories told by real women. They are exactly the type of stories that are so blatantly disregarded by those members of Congress proposing the decimation of family planning funding and unprecedented restrictions on access to abortion. This is undeniably a discriminatory and even hateful attack on the women and children of the United States. Those are strong words, but they are warranted by proposals that defy rationality and take dead aim at women's health.

1. The House's budget bill is aiming to slash family planning funds vital to women's health clinics (including Planned Parenthood) that serve 5 million women annually. Simply put, these cuts do not make sense. To the deficit hawks: Multiple [studies show](#) that every dollar spent on family planning saves roughly four dollars in costs incurred without it. To the anti-abortion folks: family planning, like education and access to contraception, [decreases the incidence of abortion](#). To those oh so many conservative fans of unbridled procreation: the proposed budget cuts also slash prenatal care, early childhood education and childcare. To anyone who cares about health in general: the cuts to family planning dollars will reduce access to screenings for cancer, high blood pressure, and diabetes as well as testing and treatment for sexually transmitted infections. In sum, the tradeoff for being able to tout billions of dollars in budget cuts will be increased costs, reduced health care access, and loss of life. We need to stand up and say, [My Health Matters](#).

2. Other bills like H.R. 3 and H.R. 358 aim to choke off insurance coverage for abortion, even when that insurance is paid for with one's own money. As it currently stands under the Affordable Care Act, most people will be required by law to purchase health insurance + Abortion is legal medical care = Women will be required by law to purchase health insurance

that denies them coverage for a critical health care need. Again, these politically motivated bills fly in the face of reality. It has been demonstrated that restricting abortion access does not reduce the incidence of abortion. However, it most certainly will increase the incidence of women needing emergency medical treatment and, frighteningly, death. The evidence is clear: [70,000 women](#) around the world pay for the lack of access to abortion every year with their lives. An estimated [5 million women](#) globally are treated for health complications related to abortion each year. Women need to tell their stories and say [My Health Matters](#).

3. One of the most insidious provisions within H.R. 358 expands conscience clause protections so broadly that it would become legal for a hospital to [deny life-saving care](#) based on “moral or religious” grounds. Right now, there are [139 members](#) of Congress who through their co-sponsorship of this bill are openly declaring that they would rather see a grown woman die than provide her with access to an abortion. Around the world, women are dying because their lives are secondary to a fetus that is highly unlikely to survive if they die. Yet still, women are being left to bleed and struggle and maybe lose their lives. Across the border in Mexico, [women have been imprisoned for having miscarriages](#), and an environment of fear has been created by prioritizing the investigation of women in need of immediate medical attention for criminal conduct. This is what really happens when politically motivated control over women’s health is put into practice. We need to stop the devaluation of women’s lives. We need to declare [My Health Matters](#).

Perhaps Kathleen Hanna said it best in her [moving speech at the Rally for Women’s Health](#) in New York City on February 26 when she said, “I’m here because women dying because they can’t afford a pap smear is unacceptable.” She’s right, because this is what will happen if vital health care is made inaccessible. Women will unnecessarily die from lack of medical care in one of the richest countries in the world. Regardless of whether you’re a Democrat or Republican, conservative or liberal, that simple fact should set off an alarm that something is going terribly wrong, and it falls on each one of us to take action to stop it.

There is power and truth in our stories. And the more attention we can bring to the untold stories of individual women and men, the more our elected leaders and the world will have to listen. We must come together to demonstrate that we refuse to sit idly by, while our health and lives are permanently compromised away. Our message has to be persistent, strong, and unyielding. Our message has to be real. Our message could not be simpler: [My Health Matters](#).