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## **Making Contraception Available Without Co-Pays a Victory for Women NOW-NYC Applauds HHS Rules on Preventive Health Care for Women**

New York – Today, the U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services accepted the recent recommendations of the Institute of Medicine to make eight critical health care services for women available through insurance without co-pays, co-insurance, or deductibles. The list of preventive care services that insurance companies will be required to cover in all new health care plans includes:

- FDA-approved methods of contraception and contraceptives counseling
- breastfeeding support, supplies, and counseling
- screening for gestational diabetes
- HIV screening and counseling
- counseling for sexually transmitted infections
- HPV DNA testing for women 30 and older
- screening and counseling for domestic violence
- at least one well-woman visit per year

NOW-NYC Deputy Director Jean Bucaria says, “This is a historic step toward addressing women’s unique health care needs. The new rules expand women’s access to preventive care, make contraception affordable with insurance, and recognize anti-violence measures as a critical part of women’s health.”

Recommendations for women’s preventive health care services have not previously been addressed in such a comprehensive manner. The IOM recommendations were made by an independent panel of medical experts who based the recommendations on a rigorous review of peer-reviewed and evidence-based studies on women’s health. They were intended to address the gap in preventive services for women that were required to be covered without additional costs under the Affordable Care Act.

According to research by Guttmacher Institute in 2009, 30% of sexually active women with low- and middle-income reported having put off visits related to family planning to save money. Bucaria says, “Women should not have to decide between dinner for their family or gas in their car and their birth control prescription. Now they won’t have to.”

Unfortunately, the guidelines do include an exemption that allows religious organizations to decide on whether or not the insurance they offer their employees covers contraception. The exemption runs counter to the fact that virtually all sexually active women use birth control at some point in their lives. Bucaria adds, “Insurance coverage for contraception should not even be a question. The health and quality of life benefits to both women and their children are extensive and well-proven.”

Beyond the religious exemption for contraception coverage, the HHS rules are being deservedly applauded by women and women’s health advocates across the country. Reducing out-of-pocket costs for contraception and expanding reproductive health services for women as part of standard preventive care is a monumentally positive change for women’s reproductive health care in this country—a change that will improve women’s health, reduce health care costs over time, and even save lives.

The National Organization for Women is the nation’s largest organization working to advance women’s rights and improve women’s lives. The New York City Chapter of NOW, founded in 1966, is the largest chapter in the country with 5,000 members locally and 35,000 statewide. NOW-NYC works to promote women’s reproductive rights, secure women’s economic empowerment, and end violence and discrimination against women.

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