The Importance of Increasing Access to Medication Abortion

Medication abortion is safe and effective yet a growing number of women face insurmountable barriers to accessing it.

The Problem: Though medication abortion is safe, effective, and legal, it is over-regulated and being pushed out of reach for many people.

- Politicians have passed more than 400 state laws against abortion since 2011, making abortion, including medication abortion, harder to obtain and afford. Recently 9 states passed extreme bans on abortion and many women believe it is now illegal.
- With an anti-abortion Supreme Court majority, abortion care is likely to become even more restricted or pushed out of reach entirely.
- Nearly two decades of research and clinical experience show that medication abortion is a safe and effective method to end an early pregnancy. Yet, national distribution restrictions and state laws limit the use of medication abortion, which imposes medically unjustified and even harmful barriers.
- A recent survey of OB/GYNs found that 72% reported having a patient who wanted or needed an abortion in the last year, but only 24% provide abortion services. Of those not currently providing abortion services, 28% said they would start offering medication abortion if distribution restrictions were changed.
- Thirty-six states have imposed laws restricting safe access to medication abortion, including dispensing limitations on non-physician clinicians and enacting bans on telemedicine services, which allows patients to connect with a health care provider over the phone and internet.

Why It Matters: Many think it’s easy to get an abortion in the U.S., but it’s not.

- Some women must drive hundreds of miles or even out of state to get the care they need. Others can’t afford the cost of an unexpected medical procedure that many insurance policies don’t cover.
- Restrictions on abortion affect women of all backgrounds, but fall hardest on those who have the least resources and face financial and logistical barriers to care.
  - Studies show that when policymakers place severe restrictions on Medicaid coverage of abortion, it forces 1-in-4 poor women seeking an abortion to carry an unwanted pregnancy to term.
  - Research shows that limiting or banning abortion can result in negative public health outcomes, especially if it results in women being forced to carry a pregnancy to term.
- Women are looking for options to end an early pregnancy that are safe and fit their circumstances.

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Today, an obvious place to look is online.
- A recent study showed that women look online for abortion medications because the nearest clinic is 60 to 100 miles from their house and some state laws mandate more than one in-office visit – making the in-clinic option impossible for their circumstances. Many women also say they can’t afford an in-clinic abortion.8
- Of the more than 10 million women of reproductive age living under the poverty level in the U.S., 22% would have to drive more than an hour to reach the closest abortion provider.9
- Another survey found that some people don’t even know if abortion is legal in their state; they assume they have to get the medication on their own.10
- Restrictions on medication abortion may result in women seeking access online from overseas suppliers outside of the FDA purview.

The Solution: Improve access to medication abortion.
- Medication abortion is an FDA-approved method to end an early pregnancy, which women have been using in the U.S. for almost twenty years.
  - A 2018 review by the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine (NASEM) confirmed the safety of abortion, including medication abortion.11
- With nearly two decades of evidence showing the safety and efficacy of medication abortion, it’s imperative that U.S. government agencies lift the unnecessary restrictions imposed on medication abortion. Lifting the restrictions will result in women having better access to a safe, FDA-approved method to end an early pregnancy, instead of turning to the internet for unregulated medications that could pose a public health risk.
  - The former FDA Commissioner, Dr. Jane Henney, who oversaw the approval of medication abortion, has called for the FDA to reevaluate its restrictions.12
  - Both the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) and the Academy of Family Medicine (AFM) support lifting current restrictions on medication abortion.13
- Lifting the unnecessary restrictions on medication abortion won’t solve the affordability problem. Congress should pass proactive legislation, like the EACH Woman Act, to reverse the Hyde Amendment and remove abortion coverage restrictions that limit women’s access to abortion care, including medication abortion.

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