

DC Preserves Access to Women's Health Care Services Amid Federal Uncertainty

By Jodi Kwarciany

A bill passed unanimously by the DC Council this month would maintain women's access to preventive health care services without cost-sharing. The "Defending Access to Women's Health Care Services Amendment Act of 2017," or [B22-0106](#), comes amidst concerns over the federal government rolling back Affordable Care Act (ACA) protections.

The bill requires health insurers to cover certain preventive health care services, like women's annual physicals, well-woman visits, screenings for breast cancer and gestational diabetes, and contraceptives. It also requires that insurers provide information on coverage to enrollees and potential enrollees, and prevents insurers from requiring cost-sharing – such as copays or deductibles – for these services. It applies to private health coverage in DC as well as the District's Medicaid program.



The bill also expands access to health services beyond what's covered in the ACA, including coverage without cost-sharing for voluntary sterilization procedures, contraceptives dispensed by pharmacists, and a wider range of FDA-approved contraceptive products.

Research shows that maintaining access to preventive health and family planning services has [economic benefits](#). For example, when women are able to access family planning services, they are more likely to pursue higher education, participate in the labor force, earn higher pay, and reduce their chances of being in poverty. It also contributes to better outcomes for their children, and reduces government expenditures on other public health services.

Congress has not succeeded in repealing the ACA's protections for women, but they have continued to attack the health law. Meanwhile, the Trump Administration announced new rules in October of 2017 that would allow employers to deny coverage for women's health services if they lodge a moral objection to such services. Federal courts have so far blocked this rule, but there are likely to be continued efforts to undermine the ACA.

Guaranteeing women's preventive services in local law ensures that DC residents will be protected in their access to these services, regardless of what happens at the federal level.

DC should further protect access to the comprehensive health coverage guaranteed through the ACA, by requiring health plans to cover [all 10 essential health benefits](#), which include things like emergency and pediatric services. The District should also maintain ACA consumer protections, like those for individuals with pre-existing conditions. Lastly, DC should restore the individual mandate, which was repealed in the federal tax bill, to keep coverage affordable. These provisions are critical, and are also at risk of being weakened, undermined or repealed.