

Institute of Medicine Women's Preventive Health Service Coverage Guidelines Talking Points

- The Institute of Medicine (IOM)'s guidelines for women's preventive health services, and the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS)'s adoption of those guidelines, are a huge victory for women's health.
- The IOM is an independent, scientific body that conducted a careful review. Under the new rules, insurance companies must cover a full range of preventive services, including well-women visits, STI and HIV screening, and contraception, without subjecting women to burdensome, costly co-pays.
- Contraception is essential to women's health. A stunning one-half of pregnancies in the U.S. are unintended. Reducing the cost of contraception is essential.
- Under the currently proposed HHS rule, houses of worship are exempt – they may refuse to offer employees insurance plans that cover contraception. This exemption should be dropped; if it *is* kept in the rule, it should be narrowed to cover only members of clergy and similar ministerial positions.
- Secretaries and groundkeepers who work for religious institutions should not have their healthcare needs subordinated to the religious views of their employers, even if their employers are houses of worship.
- Making matters worse, the US Conference of Catholic Bishops and some lawmakers have attacked the rule, arguing that the exemption should be expanded to include other types of religiously affiliated institutions, such as universities or hospitals.
- That would be shameful, as it would deny the millions of women who are employed in these institutions access to necessary and affordable contraception.
- An overwhelming majority – 99% – of American women use contraception. Religious women, including Catholics, use contraception at the same rate as the general population.
- What the Bishops and others seek is not the freedom to exercise their religious beliefs – it's the right to veto everyone's access to needed and desired medical care. This isn't about conscience; it's about an attempt to enforce religious dogma by a small clique of religious and political leaders on millions of employees and society as a whole.