



## **Healthy Women, Healthy Babies, Healthy Families**

The Oregon Foundation for Reproductive Health works to improve the health of underserved women and their children throughout Oregon, particularly in rural areas, by increasing women's access to reproductive health services. Our role is unique as a non-provider advocating for every woman regardless of her point of care—regardless of whether she goes to a publicly funded or private provider.

For years we have known that the health of a woman during her pregnancy significantly impacts the incidence of infant mortality, premature birth, low birth weight and even early childhood developmental issues.

Women are disproportionately impacted by health disparities and yet the health of women is intricately tied to the healthy lives of our children and communities. This is particularly true in rural areas, where women face particularly severe obstacles to obtaining the reproductive health services they need, resulting in disproportionately high rates of unintended pregnancies, induced abortions, STDs, and poverty. Such obstacles to obtaining critical reproductive health services can have a devastating impact on communities as a whole.

We know that unintended pregnancy is the single greatest reason women fall into poverty; we also know that socio-economic circumstances affect health and that people at the bottom of the income ladder are twice as likely to experience serious illness and premature death as are people at the top. We know that poverty significantly increases children's social and medical risks.

These risk factors—which occur in homes and in communities—include children growing up in broken homes, and families with a history of chemical dependency, mental health issues, domestic violence, child abuse, teen pregnancy, or involvement with the criminal justice system. Without significant intervention and treatment there is a linear correlation between these risk factors and subsequent educational failure, school dropout, social dependency and involvement in the juvenile justice system. The cost of preventing unintended pregnancies and support for women's health is relatively small.

The key to producing healthy children and a healthy society is women who are healthy when they conceive; who remain healthy during the course of their pregnancy; and who are part of a healthy family structure within which the child can grow and flourish. **To improve the health of all Oregonians—our women, our children, our families—we must start with Oregon women and their comprehensive access to health care, including reproductive health care.**

This fact is a crucial guidepost to improving the health of our communities. If a woman suffers from diabetes or obesity, or is smoking or drinking when she conceives, she will be at higher risk for complications during pregnancy and the infant will be at higher risk for low birth weight and

cognitive as well as physical defects and development issues. Ensuring preconception health and enabling women to plan their pregnancies improves maternal and child health and increases their family's educational, social and economic opportunity.

Currently, 395,490 women in Oregon are in need of access to affordable reproductive healthcare services and an estimated 78% of women will not receive the care they and their families need. One consequence of this systemic problem—the separation of reproductive health status from the rest of primary care—is that 48% of all pregnancies in Oregon are unintended.

Women's reproductive health often falls through the cracks entirely in the current health care system. Most primary care providers treating reproductive-aged women assume they receive reproductive health services from an OB/GYN or specialty clinic. If the woman doesn't mention she plans on getting pregnant or needs birth control, too often the primary care provider doesn't ask. Ignoring her sexual activity and any associated risks, STDs go untreated, and unprotected intercourse occurs. This reflects a systemic problem which must change for health outcomes to improve for both women and their children.

Currently there is no well women standard of care that includes reproductive health. And yet, the health care reform process in Oregon offers a unique opportunity to correct this artificial separation of reproductive health status from a primary care assessment in general practice.

When reproductive health is compromised, good health is not achievable. Therefore, simply continuing the separation between primary care and reproductive health that has developed over the last 40 years, in a reformed health delivery system, will perpetuate the fragmentation and access barriers that lead to unintended pregnancy and unhealthy babies born to unhealthy women. Study after study has demonstrated that relatively low impact interventions can make huge differences in the outcomes for reproductive health. We have a window of opportunity to establish a well woman standard as part of Oregon's healthcare reform that includes: preconception health, pregnancy planning, breast health, uterine and cervical health by PAP smears, Chlamydia and other STD screening and HPV vaccine for ages 10-25. We believe it is critical that Oregon's medical home model be designed recognizing that reproductive health status is essential to primary care.

Achieving such a well woman standard of care would integrate an assessment of key reproductive health indicators as well as the provision of necessary family planning services into primary care. By simply asking every reproductive-aged woman, "Do you intend to become pregnant in the next year?" folic acid would be prescribed more frequently to support the development of healthy pregnancies and birth control would be prescribed more frequently to prevent unintended pregnancies.

**The Oregon Foundation for Reproductive Health is seeking to increase rural women's access to reproductive health care by securing health policy that promotes the integration of reproductive health into all primary care settings. The Oregon Foundation for Reproductive Health is seeking to drive lasting change on this systemic problem.**