



FOR GENDER EQUITY

ENSURE THAT PATIENT HEALTH COMES FIRST IN YOUR STATE

Across the nation, health care providers are refusing to treat patients seeking health care based on religious beliefs. Because of religion, some hospitals have turned away patients seeking care – including birth control, abortion, and care for a miscarriage – even when their lives are in jeopardy. These practices put religious beliefs over patients' needs and they can – and have – resulted in infection, infertility, and even death.

Voters want policies that put patients first, and they are willing to hold their elected officials responsible for their votes on these issues. A March 2017 nationally representative survey done on behalf of the National Women's Law Center found that 61 percent of voters oppose laws that allow insurers, hospitals, and other providers to refuse appropriate, needed care to patients based on religious objections. And there is strong support among voters for proactive policies that ensure access to care. This includes making sure all hospitals provide a patient with the right care for her situation, including abortion, and ensuring that hospitals, doctors, and nurses provide complete information and referrals to patients about medical services, including abortion. Additionally, there is strong support among voters for measures that protect the rights of doctors and nurses to provide services, information, and advice to their patients without fear of retribution.

Patients Need Policies That Put Their Health First

Patients are suffering because health care providers are allowing religious beliefs to dictate patient access to care. Hospitals have refused to: provide patients with life-saving miscarriage management; treat a woman who needs an abortion, or even just provide her with information or referrals; provide patients with sterilization procedures at the time of cesarean delivery; and provide care to LGBTQ individuals.

At the same time, doctors and nurses who work for religiously-affiliated institutions are facing discrimination simply because they want to help patients. Doctors and nurses have been: prohibited from helping patients obtain reproductive health care; threatened with demotion or loss of jobs if they speak out about the importance of abortion and other reproductive health care; and prohibited from providing abortion care on their own time at separate clinics.

You can protect patients in your state by passing laws that explicitly require hospitals to provide patients with the right care for their situation. You can also protect health care employees from discrimination if they provide necessary care or speak out about the importance of patient access to care.

For help crafting legislation, talking points, fact sheets, and for state-specific policy research and data, please contact us at playbook@nwlc.org.

Policies that will help protect patient access to health care include:

Protecting Patients Seeking Care: Lawmakers can ensure patients get the care they need by prohibiting any health care entity from blocking a doctor's ability to provide medically appropriate care and medically accurate information to a patient about the patient's health status and medical options. Lawmakers can also require hospitals in the state to provide health and life saving medical services when needed.

Protecting Abortion Providers from Discrimination: Lawmakers should specifically prohibit hospitals and other health care employers from taking adverse actions against employees because of the employee's participation in abortion services, including on their own time at separate facilities. Lawmakers should also protect employees' ability to make public statements about abortion without fear of retaliation from their employer.

Repealing Religious Exemption Laws: Lawmakers should repeal any state laws that allow health care providers to use religious beliefs to deny patients health care.