

## Emergency Contraception

Emergency contraception (EC) is a safe and effective way to prevent pregnancy after unprotected sex or when a primary method of birth control fails. Experts believe that with widespread use the number of unwanted pregnancies could be cut in half. Unfortunately, this form of contraception is not accessible to many women. Instead, obstacles exist that make EC unavailable, too burdensome, or too costly to obtain. Further, many restrictions to EC access are being pushed at the local, state, and federal levels by an extreme minority. To deny access on the basis of one religious belief is to deny individuals the freedom to make personal decisions about their own health. All women, regardless of age, income, religion, race, or geographic location must have access to the full range of contraceptive options, including emergency contraception.

### What questions do I ask?

Effective advocacy starts with asking the right questions. How can you create change if you don't first know exactly what is wrong with the status quo? Asking the right questions arms you with the knowledge you need to make a difference in your community. Use this guide to help you use the Healthy Community Checklist on Emergency Contraception to determine if EC is available in your community.

### Who are the service providers with a stake in this issue?

Before taking action, it is important that you know who is providing — or should be providing — emergency contraception to the women in your community. We don't all need EC for the same reasons, nor do we go to the same place to obtain it. It's important to know who in your community is actually delivering services — and how much they are charging. Below are a few examples of service providers that play a significant role in making EC available and accessible.

- ▶ Medicaid offices
- ▶ Employers
- ▶ Hospital emergency rooms
- ▶ Women's clinics
- ▶ OB/GYNs
- ▶ Insurers
- ▶ Pharmacies/Pharmacists

### Who are the decision-makers?

There are a variety of decision-makers in your community who can make a real difference in ensuring that all individuals have timely access to affordable emergency contraception. Below are some examples of decision-makers whom you might reach out to when trying to address this issue in your community:

- ▶ Federal legislators (members of the US House and Senate)
- ▶ Executive agencies (Department of Health and Human Services, Food and Drug Administration)
- ▶ Governors
- ▶ State legislators
- ▶ Private insurance companies
- ▶ State Medicaid office
- ▶ Employers (those sponsoring health insurance plans)
- ▶ Hospitals

## With whom can I work?

While it may sometimes feel like you are alone in your belief that all women should have timely access to affordable emergency contraception, the reality is there are many others out there who agree with you. The key is organizing the like-minded people in your community to work together so that your collective voice is heard loud and clear by decision-makers on every level.

- ▶ **NCJW members:** As a member of the National Council of Jewish Women (NCJW), you can always look to NCJW for assistance as you tackle these important issues. Think about engaging with:
  - ▶ NCJW sections (yours and others near you)
  - ▶ NCJW State Public Affairs (SPA) Chair (if your state has one)
  - ▶ NCJW Washington office
  - ▶ NCJW Action Center
- ▶ If you are not affiliated with NCJW, log on to [www.ncjw.org](http://www.ncjw.org) for more information about NCJW's national efforts to secure and protect women's access to emergency contraception and to learn about how to get involved in NCJW's activities in your state.
- ▶ A number of national and local organizations are working to achieve affordable emergency contraceptive access for all. Use the *Resources* list to find organizations with whom you can partner in your efforts to make emergency contraception available to all who want it.

## What are the laws and policies that affect the availability of emergency contraception in my community?

While federal agencies like the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) ultimately make the decisions about how medications can be marketed and sold, there are actions states can take to facilitate access for their residents. For example, although the FDA approved Plan B emergency contraception for over-the-counter

marketing and sale only to women age 18 and older, a few states now have “pharmacy access” programs that authorize pharmacists to make EC available over the counter to all individuals, including young women. Other states require that hospitals provide information about and access to emergency contraception to victims of sexual assault who come into the emergency room.

To find out if your state has laws that facilitate access to EC for all women:

- ▶ Contact your state’s pharmacy board, the state agency responsible for the licensure and discipline of pharmacists and pharmacies.
- ▶ Visit: [www.pharmacyaccess.org](http://www.pharmacyaccess.org)
- ▶ Contact your state Health Department for information about the regulations for hospitals in your area.
- ▶ Reach out to coalition partners doing work on this issue (see the *Resources* section of this toolkit).

## What is the political climate?

As you begin to assess the health of your community regarding emergency contraception, consider the political climate in your state and locality. Watch for newspaper articles, letters to the editor, and other media reports that relate to the political and social climates in your state. Is the community generally supportive of women’s access to contraception? What, if anything, did members of your community say when the FDA approved Plan B emergency contraception for over-the-counter sales? These questions and others will help you gauge the general attitude toward this issue in your state.

Don’t forget to find out where your community leaders stand on these issues. Timely access to affordable emergency contraception is not a partisan issue. If you don’t already know where your state legislators stand, ask. Do the same for your federal legislators, your governor, and any other decision-maker who has an impact on this issue.