

## Why Do We Need Plan A?

In the United States today, there is overwhelming support for comprehensive sexuality education and the use of contraception is widespread. The vast majority of American adults support a comprehensive approach to sexuality education, one that provides information about both abstinence and contraception. Further, virtually all American women — 98 percent, according to the Alan Guttmacher Institute — use a contraceptive method at some point in their lives. Though the use of contraception may not be a controversial issue in most communities around the country, it has become one in the US Congress, state legislatures, pharmacies, hospitals, and public schools. Why? Because a vocal minority, seeking to promote one religious viewpoint, is increasingly influencing policy and practices, spreading misinformation, blocking women's access, and making it clear that access to complete and accurate information and to safe and effective contraceptive options can no longer be taken for granted.

Consider the following:

- ▶ In fiscal year 2006, the federal government provided \$178 million for abstinence-only-until-marriage programs but did not dedicate a single dollar for comprehensive sexuality education. This appropriation was made in spite of government-supported research indicating that these abstinence-only-until-marriage programs are ineffective. On the other hand, comprehensive programs about sexuality have been found to be effective in delaying the onset of sexual intercourse, reducing the number of sexual partners, and increasing contraception and condom use.
- ▶ In fiscal year 2006, the federal government provided only \$283 million for the national family planning program, Title X (10) of the Public Health Service Act. Yet, had funding for Title X kept pace with inflation, the fiscal year 2006 level would have been more than \$725 million. Title X serves more than five million low-income women and men each year, providing critical family planning services and basic health screening.
- ▶ In 2006, the Food and Drug Administration approved Plan B emergency contraception for over-the-counter sale after years of delay, but not for women under the age of 18. Yet, science has repeatedly demonstrated that Plan B is safe for use by women of all ages.
- ▶ In communities across the country, women have been shocked to learn that their pharmacists will not fill their legal prescriptions for oral contraceptives. In communities all over the country, many women are also disturbed to learn that their health insurance plans will not cover the cost of contraceptives — although they will cover the cost of drugs like Viagra.

While the majority of the American public supports access to contraceptive information and services, the reality is that not all Americans have the opportunity to take control of their own fertility.

**Contraception is not controversial, yet it's also not universal.** More work must be done to ensure that all women — regardless of age, race, geographic location, and socioeconomic status — have access to the full range of contraceptive options and medically accurate information about contraceptives. For women to truly achieve equality, they must have access to both.

By launching Plan A, the National Council of Jewish Women is strengthening the voice of the majority of Americans who support an individual's right to use contraceptives. NCJW knows that without education and mobilization, far too many women — not just young or poor women — may find themselves unable to get birth control or emergency contraception, may be told lies about the efficacy of contraceptives, or may experience an unwanted pregnancy or even disease simply because they could not get the information or the contraception they needed. The time to act is now.