# President Biden Lifts Trump-Era Restrictions on Abortion Access

President Biden signed a memo that will increase women's and girls' access to abortions in the United States as well as other countries.

February 10, 2021 By Caroline Tien

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On January 28, President Joe Biden signed a memorandum that the Human Rights Watch hailed as an "important first step to repair harm to sexual and reproductive health and rights" inflicted by the Trump administration. The measure will expand the roster of health care services available to women in both domestic and foreign locales by lifting restrictions on abortion access instituted by the infamous Mexico City policy, according to CNN.

In his four years in office, Biden's predecessor, Donald Trump, fulfilled his campaign promise to crack down on reproductive freedom by withholding funding to U.N. agencies and foreign nonprofit organizations that promoted or performed abortions. The move prevented members of the Title X Family Planning Program from referring patients for abortions and generated an international declaration that bans abortions in the interests of "promoting women's health and strengthening the family," reported a U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) press release.

In 2017, the Trump administration reinstated the Mexico City Policy and ended federal support for the United Nations Population Fund, which provides maternity care and protection from sexual violence to women and girls around the world.

First announced in 1984 by President Reagan, the Mexico City Policy, also commonly referred to as the "global gag rule," has been rescinded and reinstated by subsequent administrations along party lines. The policy has prevented women from receiving legal and safe abortions and prompted individuals to seek illegal dangerous procedures, indirectly causing many deaths worldwide, advocates observed.

"This...has been one of the most detrimental policies to women's lives, especially women coming from marginalized communities," said Melvine Ouyo, a reproductive health nurse and former clinic director at Family Health Options Kenya.

In July 2019, the policy's domestic counterpart—the Compliance With Statutory Program Integrity Requirements—went into effect. The conditions removed the mandate that health care providers in the Title X program provide accurate, unbiased information regarding pregnancy options,

prompting Planned Parenthood, among other clinic chains, to pull out of the program.

“I would say it would take a long time for providers to regain the trust and confidence that patients have had in them” as well as “to regain trust in the federal government and to assure providers that they have [the] support that they need from this administration and from Congress,” said Audrey Sandusky, the communications director for the National Family Planning & Reproductive Health Association.

The opening paragraph of the new memorandum reads: “Women should have access to the health care they need. For too many women today, both at home and abroad, that is not possible. Undue restrictions on the use of federal funds have made it harder for women to obtain necessary health care. The federal government must take action to ensure that women at home and around the world are able to access complete medical information, including with respect to their reproductive health.”

The memorandum directs the secretary of state to begin the process of resuming funding to the United Nations Population Fund, revokes the Mexico City policy and instructs the secretary of health and human services to revoke the Compliance With Statutory Program Integrity Requirements.

In addition, the order charges the secretary of state and the secretary of health and Human services to “withdraw cosponsorship and signature” from the Geneva Consensus Declaration. (This statement countered the United Nations’ Universal Declaration of Human Rights by stating, “There is no international right to abortion.”)

While reproductive rights advocates advised that further political action is needed, they praised the memorandum as a symbol that the Biden administration takes reproductive rights seriously.

It’s “a great start, one that will increase access and meaningfully impact people’s lives,” said Alexis McGill Johnson, the president and CEO of Planned Parenthood. “But—I’ll emphasize again—this is a start.”

To see how women nationwide reacted to the Trump administration’s restrictions on abortion access, read “Why Women Are Rushing to Get IUDs.” Also, to learn about women’s sexual health more broadly, read articles tagged “#sexual health.”

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