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Poll reveals Texans broadly support women's access to health care and state funding for programs

AUSTIN, TEXAS — Results from a recent survey show that Texans broadly support women's access to health care including family planning. The poll also reveals that Texans are in favor of providing state funding for women's health care programs. Support for these initiatives crosses all demographic categories—political party, race, gender, and religious affiliation—demonstrating that women's health care is an important, bipartisan issue that the Texas Legislature should consider in the current legislative session.

When asked how important it is for Texas women to have access to family planning and birth control, regardless of income barriers, more than two-thirds, or 68 percent, responded that they felt it was extremely or very important while 30 percent said "just a little important" or "not important at all." Support for access to family planning and birth control increases dramatically in the Hispanic population (with 81 percent feeling it's extremely or very important versus 16 percent feeling it's a little or not important), among women (73 percent versus 24 percent), and among respondents under 30 (84 percent versus 16 percent).

Seventy-three percent of respondents favor providing state-funded family planning services including birth control for low-income women, with 25 percent opposed. Support greatly increases among black respondents (97 percent versus 3 percent), Democrats (95 percent versus 4 percent), and respondents under 30 (85 percent versus 15 percent).

Nearly half, or 49 percent, of respondents say that they feel that women's access to family planning and birth control is being threatened in Texas, compared to 34 percent not acknowledging a threat.

The 2011 Texas Legislature devastated the women's health care safety net by enacting severe funding cuts and initiating a loss of providers to essential programs. Lawmakers cut the Department of State Health Services Family Planning program by 66 percent, blocking access to preventive care that includes well-woman examinations, breast and cervical cancer screenings, and contraception for 147,000 low-income women.

The Texas Academy of Family Physicians has long supported access to preventive health care for all Texans and, as a member of the new Texas Women’s Healthcare Coalition, the Academy supports the restoration of DSHS family planning funding to at least 2010-2011 levels and full funding for the Texas Women’s Health Program. Restoration to 2010-2011 levels would require an investment of more than \$36 million each year; the survey reveals that more than half, or 54 percent, favor fully restoring these funds compared to 42 opposed.

Janet Realini, M.D., M.P.H., is the coalition’s steering committee chair, a TAFP member, and a family physician in San Antonio. She says that the “safety net for women’s health care is in tatters,” and that the DSHS cuts combined with threats toward the Texas Women’s Health Program is “sort of a one-two punch” to the safety net.

The Texas Women’s Healthcare Coalition advocates for:

- Adequate funding for state programs to provide access to preventive health care and birth control for low- and moderate-income women in Texas; and
- Policies that assure broad availability of providers in the Texas Women’s Health Program and other state programs that provide health screenings, preconception assessment and counseling, contraception, and other preventive health care.

Especially considering the latest survey findings, TAFP and TWHC urge Texas lawmakers to rebuild the women’s health safety net to forestall a progression of undetected breast and cervical cancer, prevent complications of undetected diabetes and high blood pressure, reduce the occurrence of unplanned pregnancy, and improve the health of women and their families.

Results are based on a statewide poll of registered Texas voters, conducted by Greenberg Quinlan Rosner and Chesapeake Beach Consulting for the Texas Freedom Network Education Fund. The survey reached a total of 604 registered voters in Texas and was conducted in February 2013.

The Texas Academy of Family Physicians is the premier membership organization dedicated to uniting the family doctors of Texas through advocacy, education and member services, and empowering them to provide a medical home for patients of all ages. It has 33 local chapters and is a chapter of the American Academy of Family Physicians. Visit www.tafp.org for more information.