



Reproductive Coercion and the Los Angeles County Abortion Safe Haven Project

Los Angeles County Department of Public Health
Office of Women's Health

DVSS Provider Meeting | August 28, 2024

Susie Baldwin, MD, MPH & Blanca Garcia Silva, MPH

Before we begin the conversation...

- Today we will be talking a bit about abortion
- Acknowledge that our thoughts and beliefs about abortion have been shaped by our lived experience
- Our purpose is to increase understanding by sharing facts
- This topic can be difficult, so feel free to participate to the extent you're comfortable



Acknowledging Gender Diversity

- Gender inclusivity acknowledges that there are many gender expressions, not just two, “binary,” female and male identities
- People who identify as all genders can become pregnant and have an abortion
- In this presentation we use gender specific term of “women” in data & research studies



Reproductive health, reproductive rights and reproductive justice

- **Reproductive health** is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being- not merely the absence of disease or infirmity, in all matters relating to the reproductive system and to its functions and processes
- **Reproductive rights** encompass the freedom of people to make their own decisions about their bodies, have a right to accurate information about their health, have access to reproductive services, and decide if they want children or not
- **Reproductive justice** is the human right to maintain personal bodily autonomy, have children, not have children, and parent the children we have in safe and sustainable communities. It is informed by past reproductive injustices- particularly against marginalized groups

What is Reproductive Coercion?

- **Reproductive coercion** is an umbrella term for any behavior that seeks to maintain power and control over someone's reproductive health
- Often takes place in the context of other forms of violence or abuse. Reproductive coercion includes attempts to interfere with contraceptive use, pregnancy decision-making, and protection from sexually transmitted infections
- May involve use of force, verbal threats, pestering, tampering with birth control methods, or other actions
- Reproductive coercion may or may not involve explicit violence or force, but all forms of reproductive coercion are abuse

Reproductive coercion can take many forms. This can sound like:

**"I don't want
you to use birth
control"**

**"If you have
an abortion,
I'll leave
you"**

**"If you don't
have an
abortion, I'll
leave you"**

**"If you love me,
you'll have a
baby with me"**

What are some examples of Reproductive Coercion?

Birth control sabotage:
Interfering with a partner's birth control without their consent.

Examples include:

- Refusing to wear a condom,
- Removing a condom without partner's consent ("stealthling")
- Destroying or tampering with birth control pills, rings, patches, intrauterine contraception, etc.
- Withholding money for birth control purchase
- Failing to "pull out" after previously agreeing to do so ("pulling out" refers to the removal of the penis from the vagina before ejaculation occurs)
- Threatening to tell family, friends, or law enforcement about receiving an abortion

What are some examples of Reproductive Coercion?

Reproductive coercion may involve attempts to block access to reproductive health care.

Pregnancy Pressure:
An attempt to control the outcome of a pregnancy, by coercing the survivor into or out of a pregnancy. One partner influences the other's reproductive choices by instilling a sense of fear, powerlessness, or hopelessness.

“I was pregnant every year, when the abuse was brought to the attention of social services they asked when I am going to stop having children. I felt so stupid, I wish someone had explained reproductive coercion to me.”

More examples of what Reproductive Coercion sounds like

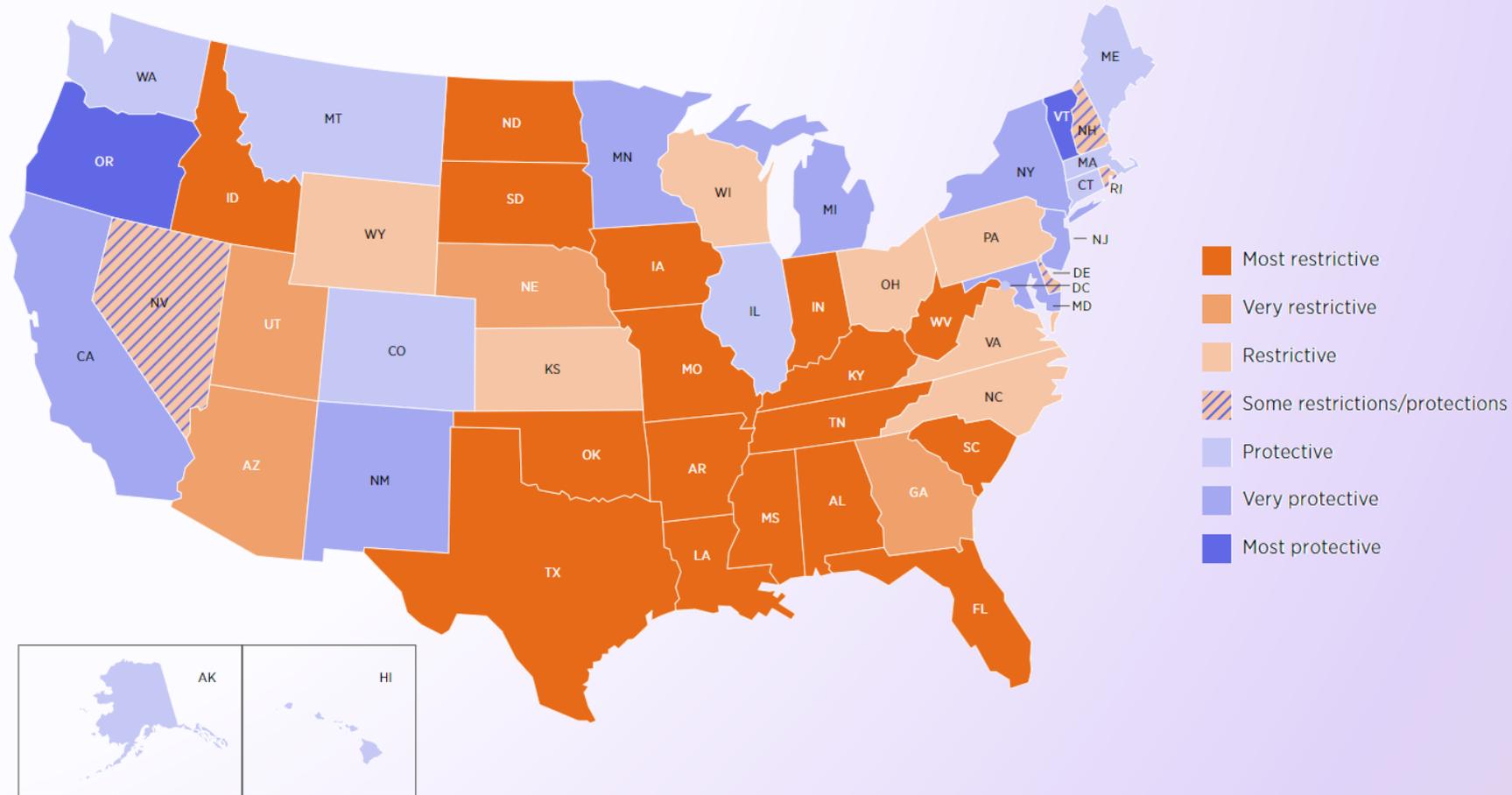
“My ex-husband prevented me from having an abortion. We lived in [a] small town in Georgia, and I had to travel to Atlanta for it. He slit my car tires and more.”

Reproductive Coercion & Health – Supreme Court Legal Context

- ***Roe v. Wade*** (January 1973)
 - Established constitutional right to abortion nationwide
- ***Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization*** (June 2022)
 - Overturned *Roe v. Wade*
 - Abortion policy left to each state



Map of Abortion Restrictions in the U.S.



The map reflects state policies in effect as of August 26, 2024

Harms of abortion criminalization in health care settings

- Laws criminalizing abortion pose a threat to the privacy and safety of all pregnant people
- Medical treatment for pregnancy loss and abortion are the same
 - Natural pregnancy loss **occurs in 15-31% of pregnancies**
 - Providers may hesitate to treat patients with pregnancy loss out of confusion and fear of legal liability
 - Many medical training programs for these procedures have stopped

Criminalization of and restrictions on abortion threaten all individuals of reproductive age and their families, especially:

- Black, Indigenous, and people of color
- Immigrants
- Lesbian, bisexual, queer women, and transgender, gender non-conforming, and intersex people
- Adolescents and foster youth
- People living in rural areas
- People with disabilities
- People experiencing homelessness
- People with substance use disorder
- People involved in the criminal justice system
- **Domestic violence** and human trafficking survivors
- Sexual assault survivors

1. Jones, R., Nash, E., Cross, L., Philbin, J., & Kirstein, M. (2022, February 22). Medication Abortion Now Accounts for More Than Half of All US Abortions. Guttmacher Institute.

<https://www.guttmacher.org/article/2022/02/medication-abortion-now-accounts-more-half-all-us-abortions>

2. Bain, M., Bouchard-Gordon, N., & Ruble, A., 2022

3. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2022

Since the “Dobbs” decision, the number of people who have **reported abuse involving reproductive coercion** to the National Domestic Violence Hotline **HAS INCREASED 2x**

<https://19thnews.org/2023/10/domestic-violence-calls-reproductive-coercion-dobbs-decision/>

<https://www.thehotline.org/wp-content/uploads/media/2024/06/reproductive-coercion-and-abuse-report-final.pdf>

Domestic violence and human trafficking survivors

- Reproductive coercion – power and control
- Homicide from intimate partner violence is the leading cause of death for pregnant women in the US
- Danger from abusive partner increases when women try to leave their situation
- Restrictive abortion policies mean women in DV or HT situations face more dangerous situations, including death

1. Winny, A., Zhu, A., & Rogers, L. S., 2021
2. Lawn, R. B., & Koenen, K. C., 2022
3. Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, 2022
4. Coverdale, J., Gordon, M.R., Beresin, E.V., et al., 2023

Domestic violence and human trafficking survivors

- Domestic violence and human trafficking survivors have difficulty accessing abortion care, lack money due to economic abuse
- In intimate partner violence, lack of access to abortion care is associated with increase of physical violence from the man involved in the pregnancy
- DV survivors denied abortion services more likely to remain tethered to abusive partner, stay in contact with a violent partner
- People who experience trafficking and bear children become more vulnerable to continued control by trafficker

1. Kippert, A., 2021
2. Roberts, S.C., Biggs, M.A., Chibber K.S., et al., 2014
3. Craig, H., 2022
4. Clark, L.E., Allen, R.H., Goyal, V., et al., 2014

Abortion Safe Haven Project in Los Angeles County

Improving abortion care services for our communities

“It’s important that LA County be a safe haven for women seeking abortion services.

It’s our duty, particularly to those who have been historically underserved in Black and brown communities.”

Holly Mitchell, LA County Board of Supervisors, 2nd District



California leads the way

- Rich history of laws that protect and enable access to reproductive health care
- Proposition 1 established a right to reproductive freedom
- Defined to **include a right to an abortion and to choose or refuse contraceptives**

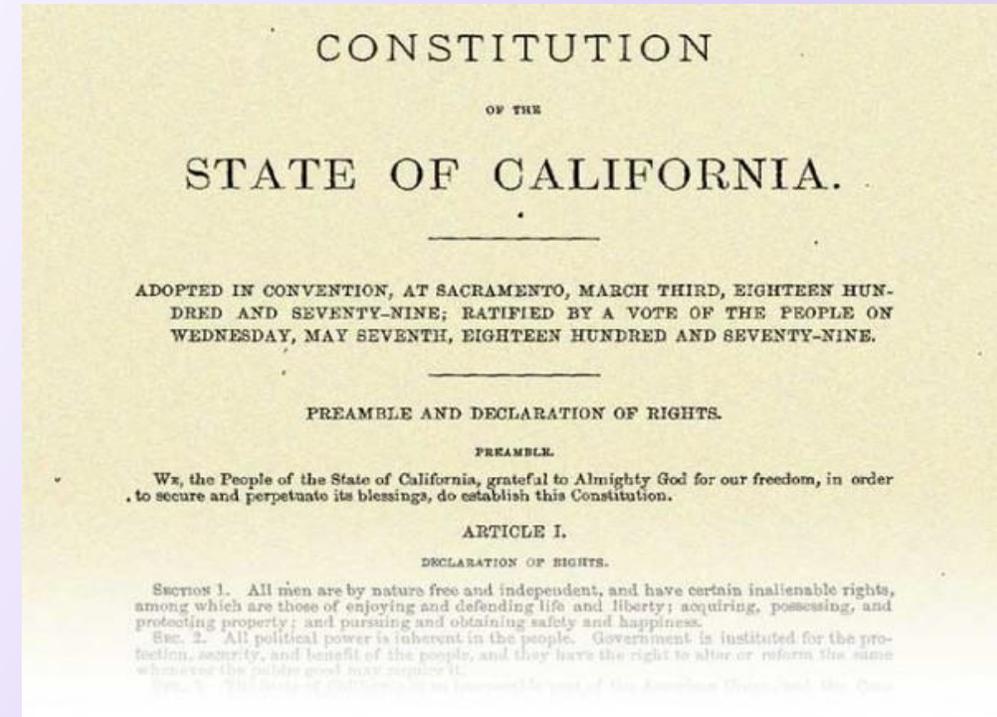


Photo credit: [California Constitution](#)

LA County Board Motion January 2022

- Motion passed by LA County Board of Supervisors to fund and **ensure people's access to quality reproductive health care services, including abortion**
- Reduce and address health disparities by **expanding reproduction and sexual health services, supplies and education** to communities most in need and historically marginalized



“Other states are shrinking the rights of pregnant women, girls, and other birthing people — but not here in Los Angeles County. We welcome those who live outside of California to travel here to receive reproductive health services. It is our collective responsibility to uphold abortion and reproductive healthcare services as a fundamental right”

*Hilda Solis, LA County Board of Supervisors,
1st District*

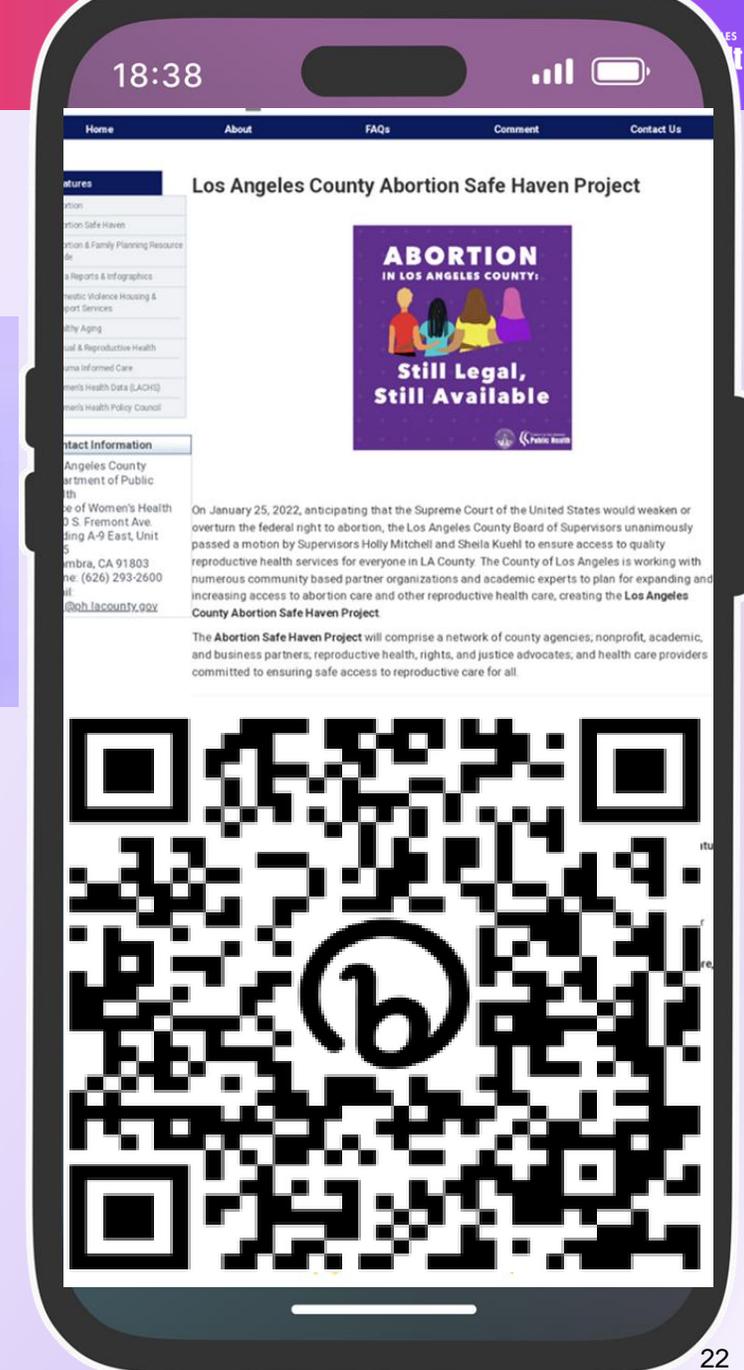


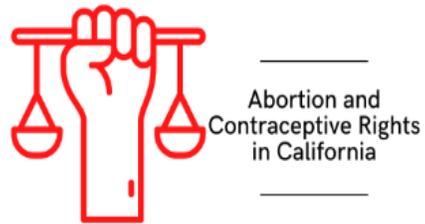
Abortion Safe Haven Website



<http://abortionsafehaven.ph.lacounty.gov/>

- Committed to expanding and ensuring safe access to reproductive **care for anyone** seeking services in Los Angeles County
- "One stop shop" for family planning and abortion resources





Main categories of resources on website

1. Providers in LA County
2. Information on local to national in-clinic & medical abortion sites
3. Abortion funding
4. Birth control & other contraceptives
5. Mental health support
6. Abortion & contraceptive rights in California
7. Doula support
8. Beware of Misleading Information

LET'S TALK ABOUT ABORTION: FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Los Angeles County Department of Public Health, Office of Women's Health

What is abortion?

Abortion is the **ending of an existing pregnancy**. When a pregnancy ends naturally, it is called a **"spontaneous abortion" or a miscarriage**. When a person takes action to end a pregnancy, it is called an **induced abortion**. **In this conversation we are talking about induced abortion.**



Is abortion safe?

Abortion is very **safe and common**. The risks of complications associated with abortion are **14 times lower than the risks associated with carrying a pregnancy to term**. In the United States, approximately 18% of pregnancies end in abortion.



Is abortion legal in California?

Yes, **abortion is legal and is a fundamental right in the State Constitution of California**. Individuals can obtain an abortion in California, **regardless of their age, immigration status, or whether they live inside or outside the state.**



What is the difference between emergency contraception and abortion pills (medication abortion)?

Emergency contraception is used **after sexual intercourse to prevent a pregnancy from occurring**. In contrast, **medication abortion ends an existing pregnancy.**



Servicios de salud reproductiva para adolescentes

Servicios Generales

Children's Hospital LA Teen & Young Adult Health Clinic
<https://www.chla.org/teenage-and-young-adult-health-clinic>
 Provee atención del VIH, asuntos menstruales y ginecológicas, salud reproductiva y anticonceptivos, incluyendo los métodos anticonceptivos reversibles de acción prolongada, atención transgénero en el este de Los Ángeles.



Eisner Health
<https://www.eisnerhealth.org/>
 Servicios básicos, pediátricos y de salud sexual disponibles para pacientes de todas las edades, incluye servicios de planificación familiar, pruebas/tratamiento de infecciones de transmisión sexual (ITS) y pruebas de embarazo. Hay ubicaciones en el centro de Los Ángeles y el Valle de San Fernando.

FPA Women's Health (FPA Salud de la Mujer)
<https://www.fpawomenshealth.com/>
 Hay ubicaciones en todo el condado, FPA proporciona servicio de aborto, pruebas / tratamiento de ITS y una variedad de opciones anticonceptivas. Haga su cita en línea en nuestra página web.





COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES
Public Health

How to Pay for an Abortion In Los Angeles County

HAVE MEDI-CAL?

With Medi-Cal, you can get confidential abortion care **at no cost to you, regardless of your age**. Medi-Cal covers transport to access abortion care through its **transportation benefit service**.

PRIVATE INSURANCE?

California law requires *most* private health insurance plans to cover abortion services **without a co-payment, deductible, or any type of cost-sharing**.

NO HEALTH INSURANCE?

If you live in CA and are income-eligible you can get **immediate** temporary Medi-Cal coverage for abortion care through the [Presumptive Eligibility for Pregnant Women Program \(PE4PW\)](http://publichealth.lacounty.gov/mch/choi/CHOIContractorListEngSp.pdf). **Get help from:** <http://publichealth.lacounty.gov/mch/choi/CHOIContractorListEngSp.pdf>

You do not need to provide ID or proof of residence. Once enrolled in PE4PW, you can apply for comprehensive Medi-Cal coverage and extend Medi-Cal for a year after the end of your pregnancy.

NOT A U.S. CITIZEN?

Regardless of documentation status, income-eligible immigrants of all ages qualify for comprehensive health care through Medi-Cal. CA does not share immigration information with federal authorities, and enrolling in Medi-Cal will not harm chances to pursue legal residency.

FROM OUT-OF-STATE?

You do not need to be a CA resident to receive abortion care here. However, many states do not allow insurance coverage for abortion. For more information about getting assistance paying for an abortion in Los Angeles County, **please see CA and National Resources on page 2.**

Multi-lingual Tools on Safe Haven website
<http://abortionsafehaven.ph.lacounty.gov/>

What are Crisis Pregnancy Centers?

- Crisis Pregnancy Centers (CPCs), are privately run places that look like health care clinics but are often not staffed by medical providers
- Deceive patients to be legitimate clinics
- Misinformation about abortion and birth control, including medication abortion reversal

Crisis Pregnancy Centers

How to Recognize and Avoid Anti-Abortion Centers

What are Crisis Pregnancy Centers (CPCs)?

- CPCs appear to be clinics for pregnant people that advertise full-spectrum reproductive services. However, CPCs do NOT provide abortion counseling, procedures, or pills.
- The goal of many CPCs is to persuade pregnant people away from abortion.
- Many CPCs are deliberately located near abortion clinics. Their advertisements and websites aim to confuse people who may be considering abortion.

Most CPCs do not provide adequate prenatal care

Although they advertise a full range of health services, only about 10% of CPCs provide prenatal care and only 53% provide referrals for prenatal care. Prenatal care includes screening for iron deficiency anemia, rubella immunity, asymptomatic bacteriuria, group B streptococcus and examinations such as blood pressure measurements, Papanicolaou smears and assessments of fundal height and fetal heart tones.

Look out for these red flags when searching for abortion services online:

"Pregnancy Decision Consultation"

CPCs tend to advertise free pregnancy tests - and if a patient tests positive for pregnancy, the CPC staff aim to convince patients to stay pregnant and give birth.



"Free Limited Ultrasound"

Some sites provide free ultrasounds, which are often conducted by untrained staff, and are used primarily not to inform patients but to manipulate them against considering abortion.

"Post Abortion Counseling"

CPCs assume that having an abortion is a negative experience and those who have had one need counseling. In reality, most people feel relief after an abortion.

"Abortion Pill Reversal"

CPCs advertise abortion "reversal" services. This protocol is NOT supported by science and can be harmful to health.

July 2024



COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES
Public Health

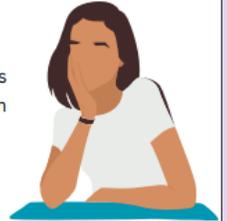
Reproductive Coercion Guide

- Defines and describes reproductive coercion
- Provides information about “hidden birth control” and legal protections to receive confidential health care services under California law
- Lists helpful questions for DV advocates to raise with clients to broach this challenging topic

Addressing Reproductive Coercion in Intimate Partner Violence (IPV): A Guide for Advocates

Content warning: This document provides information about difficult subjects, including intimate partner violence (IPV) and abuse. While the content was developed with concern for reader sensitivity, discretion is still advised.

People experiencing IPV often are denied the ability to make decisions about their own lives and bodies, including in matters related to reproductive health. This guide compiles information to improve education, support, and access to services for survivors of IPV, with the aim of enhancing reproductive autonomy and control, as well as overall health, safety, and wellbeing.



What is reproductive coercion?

Reproductive coercion is an umbrella term for any behavior that seeks to maintain power and control over someone’s reproductive health.

It often takes place in the context of other forms of violence or abuse. Reproductive coercion includes attempts to interfere with contraceptive use, pregnancy decision-making, and protection from sexually transmitted infections. It may involve use of **force, verbal threats, pestering, tampering with birth control methods, or other actions**. Reproductive coercion may or may not involve explicit violence or force, but **all forms of reproductive coercion are abuse**.



Linking Survivors with Healthcare

- IPV advocates play an important role in linking survivors to health services they may not know they need or are eligible for
- Access to healthcare can be an important part of the healing process and reduce the impacts of IPV and reproductive coercion
- Because being a survivor of domestic violence is considered a “Qualifying Life Event,” clients can enroll in health plans, including Medi-Cal, at any time throughout the year
- More info on survivors and IPV found in guide

Thank you!

Contact:

Susie Baldwin, MD, MPH

sbaldwin@ph.lacounty.gov

Blanca