

Policy Brief: Contraceptive Counseling

Impact Of Contraceptive Counseling On Patient Health Outcomes and Health Costs

Provide every woman with access to the contraception and counseling she needs to prevent unintended pregnancies.

Contraceptive counseling is an important component of contraceptive services for two key reasons: good counseling can lead to improved contraceptive use and patient health outcomes, and in doing so, it can also help to reduce health care costs. While contraception, along with the coverage to pay for it, has become an important policy issue, the cost-effectiveness of contraception is rarely mentioned or taken into account in decisions to offer coverage. However, a large body of research shows that insurance coverage for contraception actually costs *less* than no insurance or minimal insurance because contraception is preventive care that averts unintended pregnancy and helps women to achieve healthy birth intervals and prevent adverse outcomes from closely spaced births such as low birthweight.^{1,2,3}

Good contraceptive counseling can lead to improved contraceptive use.

When women receive quality contraceptive counseling, they are more likely to choose an effective method they are satisfied with, and in turn, more likely to continue to use their method over time. Research has recently identified key aspects of counseling, such as interpersonal communication and the consideration of patient preferences, that contribute to its effectiveness and ability to improve patient outcomes.⁴ Skilled counseling has been shown to be even more important for new or unfamiliar contraceptive methods.⁵ Fortunately, health care providers can be trained to improve both the quality and content of the counseling they provide. Improving the content of counseling is crucial to ensuring providers educate women about the full range of contraceptive methods and help them select the one that works best for them.

Quality contraceptive counseling is crucial to helping women select a contraceptive method that works for them.

- Good contraceptive counseling can improve contraceptive use and patient health outcomes, and therefore help reduce health care costs.
- To improve women's use of effective contraceptive methods, include all methods in contraceptive counseling and insurance coverage.
- A UCSF-PPFA study found that an intervention to increase provider skills with contraceptives and counseling lead to women's increased knowledge, selecting more effective methods, and reduce unintended pregnancy.
- Contraceptive coverage for the full range of methods is good for women and cost-effective for insurers, employers, and public health systems.

A large national randomized trial in 40 Planned Parenthood health centers demonstrated that a training intervention for providers helped to improve their contraceptive skills and counseling to include highly effective contraceptives, IUDs and the implant. Women who were seen by the trained providers showed greater contraceptive knowledge after their visit and selected highly effective contraceptives. As a result, unintended pregnancy dropped by almost half among women visiting the intervention family planning clinics. The expert counseling provided also preserved women's autonomy in contraceptive decision-making.⁶

To improve contraceptive use, include *all* methods in contraceptive counseling and insurance coverage.

In order to improve women's use of effective contraception, all methods must be included in the counseling they receive, as well as the insurance coverage they have. A recent study showed that insurance coverage of these methods not only helps women, but also cuts costs for employers and for the insurers as well. When female employees' coverage excluded contraception, total employer costs actually increased, due to a higher unintended pregnancy rate.⁷ Other important studies have demonstrated how contraceptive coverage is cost-effective for public health systems, bringing down their costs as well.^{8,9} Contraception contributes to overall cost containment in healthcare.

Contraceptive coverage is good for women and cost-effective for insurers, employers, and public health systems.

Offering women expert contraceptive counseling and services not only improves their health outcomes and supports their full economic potential, but it helps the economy in other ways, too, by reducing health care costs. Denying women contraceptive coverage is a short-sighted approach to cutting costs that will only increase them in the end. A smarter, more effective investment is to provide every woman with access to the contraception and counseling she needs to prevent unintended pregnancies.

Sources

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