

15. Public Health Integrity Act

Issue Overview

The Unregulated Pregnancy Clinic (UPC) industry is large and widespread. More than 2,600 pregnancy centers operate in all 50 states,¹⁹⁵ most of which affiliate with one or more of three national organizations: Care Net, Heartbeat International, and National Institute of Family and Life Advocates (NIFLA).

Over the past three years, [State] has granted \$XXXX to pregnancy centers. XX pregnancy centers operate in [State], and XX has received funding from the state.

Pregnancy centers [use your state's term] present themselves as free medical clinics to mislead clients seeking abortion. Their primary goal is to prevent clients, through persuasion, misinformation, or delay, from having an abortion.¹⁹⁶ While these organizations have the right to oppose abortion, most use misleading tactics, including ads, signs, and websites presenting their facilities as conventional medical clinics, even, at times, as abortion providers.^{197,198} Inside, they often resemble medical offices, with waiting rooms and exam rooms outfitted with medical equipment, and staff in lab coats and scrubs.¹⁹⁹ Clients must often fill out intake forms that ask for private health information.²⁰⁰

The vast majority of pregnancy centers [use your state's term] advertise medical or quasi-medical services. Nearly all offer free pregnancy tests²⁰¹ readily available at any pharmacy. Between one-quarter²⁰² and one-half²⁰³ advertise free STD/STI tests, and approximately three-quarters advertise free ultrasounds,²⁰⁴ typically performed by someone presenting as a medical professional.

Pregnancy centers [use your state's term] use of ultrasound machines is unethical. UPCs do not perform diagnostic ultrasounds that address medical issues. Instead, they offer so-called “limited” or “non-diagnostic” ultrasounds, intended to show pictures of the uterus they hope will dissuade clients from seeking an abortion. This is a misuse of medical equipment;²⁰⁵ even one of the three major UPC umbrella groups, Care Net, admits as much when it truthfully answers, “Can we just do ultrasounds without becoming a medical clinic?” with the answer, “Absolutely not. The use of ultrasound energy in any form is considered the practice of medicine.”²⁰⁶

Mobile pregnancy centers [use your state's term] are intentionally designed to look like conventional medical facilities.²⁰⁷ As ICU Mobile, “A Ministry Division of Care Net,” concedes: “ICU Mobile units are neutrally branded and medically designed. By having this independent brand, we break down the barriers that may prevent abortion-minded women from coming on board...”²⁰⁸ Another set of mobile UPC trucks, from Save the Storks, have painted on the sides: “Women’s Choice Center,” “Pregnancy Testing & Ultrasound,” and “mobile medical unit.”²⁰⁹

Clients seeking pregnancy services need factual medical advice. The American Medical Association “advocates that any entity offering crisis pregnancy services...truthfully describe the services they offer or for which they refer—including prenatal care, family planning, termination, or adoption services—in communications on site and in their advertising, and before any services are provided to an individual patient.”²¹⁰

Pregnancy centers commonly tell these five medical lies:

1) That having an abortion raises the risk of developing breast cancer. However, the American Cancer Society,²¹¹ the National Cancer Institute,²¹² and the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists²¹³ have flatly refuted this claim.

2) That having an abortion raises the risk of infertility. A study published by the National Institutes of Health found that “there is no association between abortion and secondary infertility.”²¹⁴ A Guttmacher Institute survey of scientific studies found that abortion poses “virtually no long-term risks of future fertility-related problems such as infertility...”²¹⁵ The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists also shares that position.²¹⁶

3) That having an abortion raises the risk of negative emotional or mental health problems or increases the risk of suicidal ideation. An American Psychological Association Task Force²¹⁷ and a comprehensive New England Journal of Medicine study²¹⁸ found no such evidence. A study published by the National Institutes of Health concluded that abortion is “not a statistically significant predictor of subsequent anxiety, mood, impulse-control, and eating disorders or suicidal ideation.”²¹⁹

4) That medication abortion poses greater risks than other common prescription drugs or than childbirth. In fact, an analysis of U.S. Food and Drug Administration data found that mifepristone is four times safer than penicillin, ten times safer than Viagra, and more than four times safer than childbirth. Further, a two-drug medication abortion using both mifepristone and misoprostol is even safer.²²⁰

5) That an abortion procedure poses greater health risks than other common medical procedures or than childbirth. In fact, “the risk of complication or mortality from abortion is less than the same risk from common procedures like wisdom tooth removal, cancer-screening colonoscopy, and plastic surgery,” according to the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists.²²¹ A study based on data from the Centers for Disease Control found that the “risk of death associated with childbirth is approximately 14 times higher than that with abortion.”²²²