

FACT SHEET

Women Who Rely on the Military for Health Care Deserve Comprehensive Birth Control Coverage and Counseling: Support the Access to Contraception for Women Servicemembers and Dependents Act

February 2015

Senator Jeanne Shaheen and Representative Speier have introduced the Access to Contraception for Women Servicemembers and Dependents Act of 2015 to ensure that all servicemembers and their dependents who rely on the military for health care have comprehensive contraceptive coverage and counseling. Access to such a basic preventive health service is critical to promote both military readiness and quality of life.

This Bill Would Bring TRICARE's Contraceptive Coverage Policies In Line With Other Employer-Based Insurance Plans

- Under the military's health care program, all active duty servicemembers have coverage of all prescriptions, including contraceptives, with no cost sharing (that is without co-pay, co-insurance, or deductible) no matter where or how they obtain their prescription. Other women who rely on TRICARE for health insurance, including non-active duty servicewomen and military family dependents, are faced with cost sharing when they fill their prescriptions outside of the military treatment facility.
- TRICARE's contraceptive coverage is less comprehensive than what is now required for most health plans. Under the Affordable Care Act (ACA), which does not extend to TRICARE, new group and individual health plans must cover – without cost sharing – all FDA-approved contraceptive methods and any related education and counseling. Federal employees also now have this coverage as the Office of Personnel Management adopted the ACA requirement as part of the Federal Employees Health Benefits Program.
- Contraception is basic preventive health care for women. Women who rely on TRICARE must have the same coverage of this critical service as other women now have. By making a technical fix to the statutory provision that imposes cost sharing, this bill would bring TRICARE in line with standard contraceptive coverage of other health insurance plans.

This Bill Would Ensure that Women Servicemembers Receive Comprehensive Contraceptive Counseling

- Although active duty women servicemembers receive coverage of contraceptive methods without cost sharing, studies indicate that these women need comprehensive contraceptive counseling and education. By providing such counseling and education, the military can ensure that its servicemembers have the tools and information to be able to make informed family planning decisions.

- This bill would remedy this gap in family planning counseling by requiring the Department of Defense to develop tools for its health care providers to receive the most up-to-date standards of care with respect to the full range of methods of contraception and counseling on all of those methods. Such tools will help ensure that servicewomen receive comprehensive contraceptive counseling, including information on the full range of contraceptive methods and the effectiveness of various methods during deployment or training. These provisions ensure that servicewomen are able to make fully-informed decisions regarding their contraceptive needs.

This Bill Would Require the Department of Defense to Develop a Uniform Standard Curriculum to Incorporate in Family Planning Education Programs Across the Services

- Recognizing the importance of family planning for military readiness, the military has taken steps in offering family education programs for its servicemembers. However, the military must do more to ensure that all of its servicemembers – both men and women – receive comprehensive family planning education.
- Comprehensive family planning both reduces unintended pregnancy and promotes military readiness. Family planning, which can include consideration of servicemembers' training and deployment schedules and working conditions, can minimize preventable disruptions to the military's operations and contribute to the overall health of the force.
- This bill would enhance existing military family planning education programs by requiring the Department of Defense to establish a uniform standard curriculum that can be used in family planning education processes across the Services. This curriculum would emphasize the importance of family planning to military readiness and provide current, medically-accurate information to servicemembers in a clear, user-friendly manner.

The Bill Would Improve Access to Emergency Contraception for Survivors of Sexual Assault

- The Department of Defense has made significant strides in ensuring by regulation that emergency contraception is available for sexual assault survivors who present at military treatment facilities for care. In supporting these efforts, this bill would codify and expand current regulations by requiring military treatment facilities provide survivors of sexual assault comprehensive and medically accurate information regarding the methods of emergency contraception. The bill would further require the provision of emergency contraception upon the request of the survivor.
- Such provisions ensure that women who are sexually assaulted and present at a military treatment facility are given the critical and time-sensitive medical counseling and care that they may need.