



Issue: Promoting Sexual & Reproductive Health

Position Statement:

The Action Alliance supports full access to non-judgmental, safe, legal, affordable, and medically accurate sexual and reproductive health care for all survivors of sexual and intimate partner violence. The Action Alliance supports full access to prevention education and services that promote sexual and reproductive health and wellness across the lifespan. The Action Alliance supports policies that promote a trauma-informed approach¹ to sexual and reproductive coercion and violence when it occurs and policies that seek to reestablish autonomy, safety, and empowerment for all survivors of violence as they make informed decisions about their health, their families, and the services needed to heal and thrive.

Rationale:

Reproduction and sexuality are integral parts of the human experience with physical, emotional, intellectual, social, and spiritual dimensionsⁱ. A person's sexual and reproductive health are directly impacted by experiences of sexual and intimate partner violence. Because acts of violence serve to remove power and agency from individuals, informed consent is imperative for treating survivors. Allowing survivors to make informed decisions regarding their care is an empowering step toward recovery. Furthermore, given the complexity of violence and survivorship, disparities based on age, gender identity, race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status often limit access to quality health information and services, constrain the ability to control one's own body and health decisions, and make survivors from historically marginalized and oppressed groups more vulnerable to poor health outcomes.ⁱⁱ

In addition to dealing with the direct physical and emotional impacts of violence, survivors have the burden of addressing the possibility of sexually transmitted infections (STIs), pregnancy and/or infertility, and other sexual and reproductive health issues. For this reason, access to sexual and reproductive health care is critical to recovering

¹ Trauma-informed approaches promote healing environments that share a set of core principles: safety, trust, collaboration, choice, empowerment, and recognition of cultural and historical contexts.

from the trauma of sexual and intimate partner violence—and that access must include options for all people regardless of income, gender identity, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, religion, ability, or age. A survivor of sexual violence who is pregnant must be able to make decisions about whether to end a pregnancy, choose adoption, or raise a child. As part of that process, they should have access to non-judgmental, safe, legal, affordable, and medically accurate information and care, without pressure or added burdens. This care includes, but is not limited to:

- Forensic nurse examination and physical evidence collection/recovery;
- Treatment for gynecological and physical injuries and symptoms;
- Preventive treatment (postexposure prophylaxis) for STIs, including HIV and Hepatitis B;
- Contraceptive counseling and services to reduce risk of unintended pregnancy, including access to the birth control pill, intrauterine devices (IUDs), and emergency contraceptives;
- Family planning counseling and medical consultation, including adoption services and safe and legal abortion;
- Prescription medication and/or alternative treatments associated with trauma recovery;
- Gender affirming and culturally relevant support services, including counseling and/or trauma-informed advocacy services.

Evidence consistently indicates that access to medically accurate and patient-centered sexual and reproductive health and wellness education and services has many positive outcomes, including reduced rates of unintended pregnancies in teens and adults, early detection of treatable infection, and a lifetime incidence of lower sexual risk-taking and lower rates of relationship violenceⁱⁱⁱ.

Achieving individual and community health requires measuring health, not just by the absence of illness or disease, but by access to resources and opportunities that enable all people to live a long and healthy life^{iv}. Access to services and strong prevention education, combined with efforts to address historical trauma and health inequities, ensures that individuals are equipped with the information, resources, and health care needed to make informed and positive choices for themselves and their families in a manner that is free from judgment or coercion.

ⁱ Perry, B. 2011. "Healthy Sexuality for Sexual Violence Prevention: A report on promising curriculum-based approaches". Virginia Sexual & Domestic Violence Action Alliance.

ⁱⁱ Hall, KS; Moreau, C; Trussell, J. 2012. "Determinants of Disparities in Reproductive Health Service Use Among Adolescent and Young Adult Women in the US, 2002-2008" American Journal of Public Health, Vol 102, No 2, February 2012.

ⁱⁱⁱ Advocates for Youth. 2009. Web Source: "Comprehensive Sex Education Research and Results".

^{iv} Boston Public Health Commission. 2017. Web Source: "What is Health Equity?".