

Statement on Protecting the Physician-Patient Relationship and Access to Reproductive Care

The Washington Academy of Family Physicians (WAFP) joins our national organization, the American Academy of Family Physicians (AAFP), in advocating for everyone's right to health care and to protect family physicians. We oppose actions that negatively impact the confidential relationship between a patient and their physician or restrict the provision of evidence-based patient care for any patient.

We support policies and practices that:

- Provide access to evidence-based comprehensive care and information
- Recognize abortion care access as a component of comprehensive reproductive health care
- Protect patients and clinicians who provide evidence-based care
- Protect the integrity of the physician-patient relationship and prevent external interference into this relationship

Comprehensive reproductive health care is essential to patients' health. In all areas of their health, patients must be able to rely on their physicians to assist them in making critical decisions about their personal health. The WAFP opposes policies and practices that threaten our patients' ability to make informed decisions about their care.

The following resources provide more information from both the state and national academies regarding access to reproductive health and protecting the physician-patient relationship.

External Communications

April 2022 [statement](#) from AAFP opposing policies that criminalize care and threaten patient-physician relationship. WAFP affirmed this statement.

September 2021 Group of Six [statement](#) opposing Texas SB 8, which effectively banned abortion and related medical support as early as six weeks into pregnancy. It also allows private citizens to sue physicians, clergy, family, or any person who helps a woman obtain an abortion, with no exception for rape or incest, for up to \$10,000.

In September 2021, AAFP joined an [amicus brief in opposition](#) to Mississippi's law that would prohibit abortion after 15 weeks.

WAFP Policies

In July 2019, WAFP adopted the following policy about abortion care access: "The Washington Academy of Family Physicians (WAFP) believes abortion care access is one component of providing comprehensive reproductive health care. Such care is a decision to be made between a patient and the patient's physician. When such care is needed, the WAFP supports all clinicians who are trained to provide abortion care within the bounds of state law. We encourage and support the prevention of the need for abortion care by affirming universal access to contraception and improving the quality and availability of sex education."

AAFP Policies

[Reproductive Decisions Policy](#): The AAFP encourages all family physicians to provide patient education on contraceptive options at every available opportunity to avoid unintended pregnancies. In the event of an unintended pregnancy, family physicians should educate patients about all options. If a patient desires termination of their pregnancy or adoption, family physicians should provide resources to facilitate those services. If a family physician's moral or ethical beliefs conflict with the ability to provide the requested resources or education, the family physician should ask a colleague to provide this information in a timely fashion rather than omit it.

[Infringement on Physician-Patient Relationship](#): Only in a setting of trust can a patient share the private feelings and medical, social and family histories that enable the physician to properly counsel, prevent, diagnose, and treat. The AAFP opposes legislation that infringes on the content or breadth of information exchanged within the patient physician relationship because of the potential harm it can cause to the health of the individual, family, and community.

[Criminalization of the Medical Practice](#): The American Academy of Family Physicians takes all reasonable and necessary steps to ensure that medical decision-making and treatment, exercised in good faith, does not become a violation of criminal law.

[Reproductive and Maternity Health Services](#): The AAFP supports a woman's access to reproductive and maternity health services and opposes nonevidence-based restrictions on medical care and the provision of such services.

[Training in Reproductive Decisions](#): The AAFP supports the preservation of personally held moral principles so that no physician or health care professional shall be required to perform actions that violate personal ethics. The AAFP also strongly believes that there is an ethical obligation to provide complete and accurate medical information and referrals for desired services for pregnant patients, and to ensure that when referrals are made, they are made for appropriate evidence-based services.