Planned Parenthood: Setting the Record Straight

In 2015, a series of undercover videos showed officials of the Planned Parenthood Federation of America (PPFA) discussing how they perform abortions and traffic in the tissues and organs of abortion victims. The officials’ matter-of-fact comments on destroying unborn human life, and on altering abortion methods to obtain more “intact” organs, led to a public debate on Planned Parenthood’s role as a “women’s health” organization receiving large government subsidies. That debate intensified in 2019 with release of the film Unplanned, based on a memoir of the same name by former Planned Parenthood clinic director Abby Johnson. Here are key facts.

1. **PPFA is by far the largest abortion provider in the U.S.**
   In the year ending September 30, 2018, the last year reported, Planned Parenthood affiliates performed 345,672 abortions, both surgical and “medical” (using the abortion drug RU-486).\(^1\) PPFA’s share of the abortion “market” has expanded steadily over the years: It performed about one in five of all abortions in the United States in 2005, but now performs 40% of them.\(^2\)

2. **Every Planned Parenthood affiliate must perform abortions.**
   In 2010, PPFA announced that by 2013 every affiliate must have one or more clinics that perform abortions on-site. Some affiliates left PPFA rather than comply with the new abortion mandate.\(^3\) In 2017, PPFA’s CEO Cecile Richards said it is “obscene and insulting”\(^4\) to suggest that the organization discontinue its abortion business in order to continue receiving taxpayer funds for its other activities.\(^5\) In 2019, new CEO Leana Wen reaffirmed that “providing, protecting and expanding access to abortion” is part of Planned Parenthood’s “core mission.”\(^6\) But largely because Dr. Wen also sought to present abortion as one part of “comprehensive” women’s health care, she was forced to resign later that year.\(^7\) Her replacement is Alexis McGill Johnson, former chair of Planned Parenthood’s political action committee, hailed by the organization as a “lifelong political organizer.”\(^8\) In August 2019, Planned Parenthood abandoned the Title X family planning program rather than comply with new rules against providing elective abortions and abortion referrals in this federal program.\(^9\)

3. **Planned Parenthood provides 25 times more abortions than birth-oriented services or referrals.**
   While PPFA says abortions make up 4% of its services, this is misleading. PPFA says it served 2.4 million patients (women and men) and performed 345,672 abortions in the last reported year. This means that over 14% of everyone entering a Planned Parenthood clinic receives an abortion.\(^9\) And PPFA provided only 9,798 “prenatal services” (down from 17,610 in 2004) and 4,279 referrals for adoptions at other agencies. So 96% of its services dealing with pregnancy are abortions, outnumbering other options 25 to 1.\(^10\)

4. **Planned Parenthood promotes risky RU-486 abortions that have killed young women.**
   PPFA strongly supports the dangerous abortion drug RU-486, promoted its expedited approval by the FDA, and volunteered to conduct early U.S. trials. In early trials, young Californians Holly Patterson and Vivian Tran died from infections after RU-486 abortions at Planned Parenthood clinics.\(^11\) In April 2011, the FDA reported 2,207 adverse events up to that time, including 14 deaths, 339 cases of blood loss requiring transfusions, and (in addition to deaths) 612 hospitalizations.\(^12\) Actual figures are likely higher, as the FDA does not mandate reporting by providers. PPFA clinics flouted FDA protocols by, among other things, using RU-486 “off-label” for abortions up to 63 days after a woman’s last menstrual period (two weeks later than the FDA found safe). When Ohio passed a law requiring clinics to follow FDA guidelines, Planned Parenthood sued to tie up the law in court; public data later showed 42 botched RU-486 abortions in Ohio, including 35 women who had to return for a surgical abortion.\(^13\) Despite these
5. Planned Parenthood fights even modest laws to reduce or regulate abortions.

PPFA has opposed, and filed suit against, reasonable and widely supported measures on abortion, even those protecting women’s health and informed decision making. These include:

- laws to ensure a woman’s informed consent, allow her to view an ultrasound before the abortion, or provide a waiting period for her to consider her decision
- parental notification or consent before a minor daughter’s abortion
- bans on the gruesome partial-birth abortion procedure or on other late-term abortions
- health and safety regulations for abortion facilities
- requiring abortion practitioners to have admitting privileges at a hospital in case of complications
- safety standards for the abortion drug RU-486.

6. Planned Parenthood doesn’t believe in a “right to choose” against abortion.

“Freedom of choice” does not apply to those who disagree with PPFA. The organization opposes laws recognizing conscience rights for doctors, nurses and health facilities with moral or religious objections to abortion, dismissively referring to conscience clauses as “refusal laws” that “enable discrimination.”

Planned Parenthood strongly supports U.S. funding of the U.N. Population Fund (UNFPA); in 2013 it announced “a new level of partnership” with that agency internationally, despite its involvement in the Chinese population program using coerced abortion and involuntary sterilization. Such coercion is recognized internationally as a crime against women.

PPFA also opposes conscience rights for pharmacists who object to providing “emergency contraception” drugs due to their abortifacient potential, and it urges the government to force even religious orders like the Little Sisters of the Poor to include these in their health plans. In its 2017-2018 annual report, PPFA celebrated its role in passing a Washington state law forcing women in the state who want maternity coverage to purchase elective abortion coverage.

7. Planned Parenthood is not “pro-choice” for women.

In light of the failure of contraceptive programs to reduce unintended pregnancies or abortions, Planned Parenthood has increasingly promoted “LARCs” (long-acting reversible contraceptives)—implantables, injectables, and intrauterine devices—that can sterilize women for months or years at a time. These now make up over 35% of its contraceptive services. Most women had rejected these methods in the past due to their inflexibility and side effects. But supporters favor them for “eliminating adherence and user dependence from the effectiveness equation” because their effectiveness is “independent from... user motivation” — that is, LARCs disregard a woman’s own changing reproductive goals, and IUDs and implants cannot be discontinued by women without medical assistance. PPFA has even abandoned “pro-choice” as a slogan, insisting instead that contraception and abortion are basic “health care” that all women need access to -- whether women ask for that or not.

8. Planned Parenthood’s role in serving women’s health is compromised at best, and is better taken over by others.

Planned Parenthood’s supporters cite its “cervical and breast cancer screenings,” which make up only 6% of its services—but its heavily promoted contraceptive services, 26% of PPFA’s activities, are associated with an increased risk of cervical and breast cancer. Planned Parenthood’s “screening” for breast cancer is a preliminary screen that a woman can do for herself—it offers no mammograms or biopsies. PPFA emphasizes its testing and treatment of sexually transmitted diseases, but it heavily promotes contraceptive methods that may increase women’s risk of contracting STDs, including AIDS.
Women’s comprehensive health needs are much better served by community health centers and other federally qualified health centers, which serve over 24 million patients in both urban and rural areas and outnumber Planned Parenthood clinics 15 to 1 (9,754 to “more than 600”).

9. “Nonprofit” Planned Parenthood reaps enormous revenues, including tax revenues.
PPFA is legally a nonprofit organization but takes in enormous revenues: $1.64 billion in the year ending June 30, 2019, netting $110.5 million over expenses. $616.8 million, or almost 38% of total revenue, is from taxpayers’ dollars, up from 34% the previous year. This is more than double the $305.3 million in government funds received in the year ending June 30, 2006. This funding increase occurred while Planned Parenthood’s U.S. clientele decreased from a reported 3 million to 2.4 million people of both genders.

10. Even as Planned Parenthood’s government funding has increased, the number of medical services it provides has decreased—but not abortions.
From 2004 to 2018, Planned Parenthood reported a dramatic decrease in the following: Pap tests (down by 78%), breast exams (71%), total cancer screenings (74%), and even contraception/sterilization by any method (25%). By contrast, abortions have increased by almost 36% since 2004. There has been a clear shift in the kinds of services Planned Parenthood provides, away from the other services it boasts of and toward abortion.

11. Planned Parenthood promotes risky “emergency contraception” to minors.
PPFA distributed 593,586 kits of high-dose “emergency contraceptive” (EC) pills in 2018. It has urged approval for “over-the-counter” sale of these drugs, even to minors, although lower-dose birth control pills require a prescription due to health risks. Planned Parenthood’s claim that boosting access to ECs would reduce unintended pregnancies and abortions has been rebutted by numerous studies.

12. Planned Parenthood has promoted abortions worldwide, even where it is illegal.
PPFA exports its ideology to developing nations, promoting abortion as family planning, and declares it is “a founding member of the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF).” As long ago as 1983, the then-current president of PPFA co-authored and signed a notorious IPPF declaration urging affiliates to violate their own countries’ laws and perform illegal abortions: “Family Planning Associations and other non-governmental organizations should not use the absence of a law or the existence of an unfavourable law as an excuse for inaction; action outside the law, and even in violation of it, is part of the process of stimulating change.”

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9 The discrepancy arises from the way PPFA counts each “discrete clinical interaction” during a visit as a separate “service.” Thus for 2018 it reports “more than 9.8 million services during nearly 4 million clinical visits,” 2018-2019 Report, p. 22 note 11. A critic observes: “By Planned Parenthood’s math, a woman who gets an abortion but also a pregnancy test, an STD test and some contraceptives has received four services, and only 25 percent of them are abortion.” R. Lowry, “Planned Parenthood’s pathetic ‘3 percent’ lie,” New York Post, August 3, 2015, at https://nypost.com/2015/08/03/planned-parenthoods-pathetic-3-percent-lie/.


12 See Food and Drug Administration, “Mifepristone U.S. Postmarketing Adverse Events Summary through 04/30/2011” (accessed May 2019 but no longer available online; see updated figures at note 15 below).


