

CPCs Feed Client Information to Big Data

“One huge threat that CPCs pose, about which most people are unaware, concerns patient privacy. CPCs may pose as legitimate reproductive health clinics, but the vast majority of them provide no health care services whatsoever. Consequently, many of the legal protections against disclosure of personal health information do not apply to these so-called clinics. This enables them to collect vast amounts of personal information, which they can use to build their movement or share with others—with almost no accountability or oversight.”

— KIM CLARK, Senior Attorney, Legal Voice, Washington

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An in-depth investigation of CPCs by Privacy International, a UK-based organization that defends and promotes the right to privacy across the world, found that Heartbeat International (HBI) is leading the anti-abortion movement’s effort to collect and store client information. The report provides a glimpse into how the CPC movement is leveraging big data, the lack of transparency regarding how the data is used and where it is shared, and the potential for privacy violations.¹⁸⁸

Health care providers in the U.S. are subject to the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA), which requires that patient information be kept private. Because CPCs typically do not provide health care, they are not subject to the law.

According to the Privacy International report, Heartbeat International is collecting client data through a content management system called Next Level, which collects “name, address, email address, ethnicity, marital status, living arrangement, education, income source, alcohol, cigarette, and drug intake, medications and medical history, sexual transmitted disease history, name of the referring person/organisation, pregnancy symptoms, pregnancy history, medical testing information, and eventually even ultrasound photos.”¹⁸⁹

Heartbeat International promotes Next Level by assuring CPC administrators, “You’re part of a global mission and you know it.”¹⁹⁰ While HBI claims they employ “the necessary” HIPAA protections on their website, Privacy International notes “Next Level’s privacy policy states that the company ‘may share such information with Next Level affiliates, partners, vendors, or contract organizations.’”¹⁹¹

HBI also collects client data through the online chat service Option Line and its “abortion pill reversal” hotline. As Privacy International noted: “The Option Line chat interface requires visitors to enter their name, demographic information, location information, as well as if someone is considering an abortion. Only after submitting this personal information does the chat begin. It is unclear where the data submitted prior to the chat beginning, as well as the data generated during the chat, ends up, and who has access to it.”¹⁹²

Privacy International notes that Option Line’s terms of service state that client information can be used “for any and all purposes [believed to be] appropriate to the mission and vision of Option Line.”



The CPC industry’s extensive use of sophisticated digital strategies to collect and mine client data is deeply concerning, especially as the Texas six-week abortion ban that went into effect on September 1, 2021 allows private citizens to sue anyone who “aids or abets” a friend, family member, loved one, or stranger to obtain a banned abortion and receive at least \$10,000 in compensation. **CPCs are now positioned to surveil pregnant people and feed their data to vigilante anti-abortion bounty hunters anywhere in the country.**