

Appearing Local, Acting Global: CPCs Are Key Players in the International Anti-Abortion Movement

While individual CPCs may appear to be small, local, and independent facilities, the crisis pregnancy center industry is a sophisticated global network led by international, national, and regional anti-abortion organizations. These organizations, most of which are part of broader evangelical, Catholic,¹⁶⁴ and Christian nationalist movements,¹⁶⁵ provide extensive technical support to CPCs across the country, including digital strategy, infrastructure, and content; marketing and public relations; training and technical support.

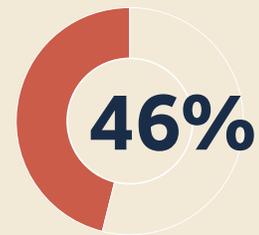
► *For more information see the Alliance Study companion resource, **Global, National & Regional Anti-Abortion Organizations Supporting CPCs**, at alliancestateadvocates.org/publications.*

Under the direction of the major umbrella groups, CPCs are using sophisticated digital tactics, targeting clients online and on mobile phones, directing prospective clients to centralized hotlines and online chat services, and collecting and storing massive amounts of data on the reproductive and sexual histories of people, including “digital dossiers” of clients that in some cases also track their religiosity.

Crisis pregnancy centers have also adapted well-established practices to the digital age.

For example, CPCs frequently open near reproductive health clinics and use names and logos similar to nearby clinics.¹⁶⁶ The Alliance found this practice remains common: 10% of CPCs in this Study were mobile clinics, which can be positioned near abortion clinics and can directly intercept people seeking their services. All but two Study states, Idaho and Alaska, had mobile CPCs; the states with the highest presence of mobile clinics were Washington (36.4% of CPCs were mobile), New Mexico (16.1%), California (15.1%), and Montana (15.0%).

The modern CPC industry has adapted this strategy of mimicking women’s health clinics in online spaces by creating websites that imitate the language on abortion clinic sites. In a recent study examining CPC website messaging and visual cues, researchers found that CPCs mirror language signaling patient-centeredness, which may convince clients they are legitimate medical establishments. The study of CPC websites in nine Southeastern states found that websites explicitly communicate that CPCs are environments of non-judgement, choice, and freedom from coercion while obfuscating their services. In tandem, they did not always state their unwillingness to support or provide abortion but described a “free and open environment” and a “full range of choices.”¹⁶⁷



THE ALLIANCE FOUND 45.8% OF CPCs IN OUR STUDY STATES ARE AFFILIATED WITH ONE OR MORE OF THESE GROUPS:

Organizational Affiliation*	
Any national/regional org	239 (45.8)
Care Net	117 (19.3)
Heartbeat International	65 (10.7)
Birthingright	35 (5.8)
Real Alternatives	27 (4.4)
Obria	15 (2.5)
Elevate Life	13 (2.1)
Religious Institution	10 (1.6)
NIFLA	4 (0.7)
Culture of Life Family Services	2 (0.3)
Other	58 (9.6)
None Specified	280 (46.1)

*Some CPCs have more than one affiliation

“CPCs outnumber legitimate clinics in much of the South, often infiltrating networks of medical referral and social support, while delaying desired, necessary and timely care through deceptive tactics. In the online space, CPCs are sometimes indistinguishable from legitimate clinics. This speaks to how effectively CPCs have strategized to obfuscate their true motives and penetrated the health care arena and how they are exploiting the landscape of unmet needs, especially in rural and underserved communities.”

—SUBASRI NARASIMHAN, PhD, Research Assistant Professor, Rollins School of Public Health & the Center for Reproductive Health Research in the Southeast, Emory University, Georgia



Researchers in the Southeast also found 67% of CPCs used prominently placed photos of women of color on their website, most often on their homepage.¹⁶⁸ Website and marketing images featuring models of color act as visual cues signaling that CPCs are trusted sources of information for people of color, especially Black women, advancing a long-standing CPC strategy of racial targeting. The CPC movement stepped up its racial targeting in 2003 through a Care Net/Heartbeat International-led “Urban Initiative” program focused on Black women and on opening “urban” CPCs in majority Black and minority neighborhoods.^{169 170} CPC marketing strategies targeting people of color also lend “a veneer of inclusivity to a fundamentally white movement.”¹⁷¹

These tactics effectively confuse target clients: A recently published study found only two out of five people were able to correctly identify that CPCs did not provide abortion services after looking at their websites.¹⁷² People with low health literacy and lack of previous knowledge about abortion care were the least likely to be able to recognize a CPC by its website.¹⁷³

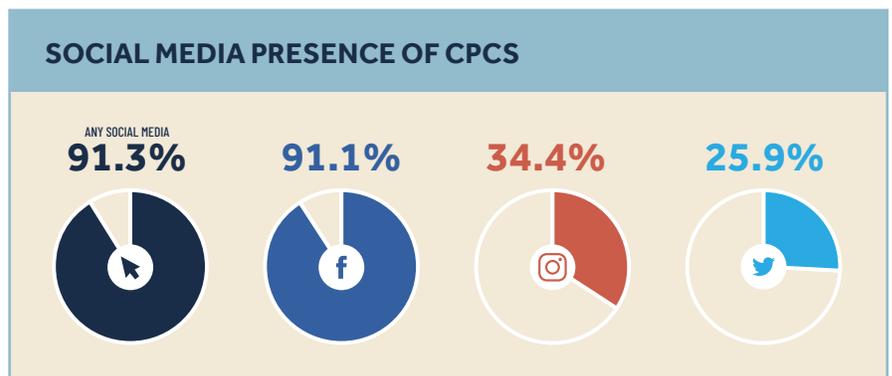
Moreover, many CPCs maintain dual websites: a secular site to appeal to pregnant people, and a religious one to appeal to donors and supporters.¹⁷⁴ Heartbeat International encourages affiliates to create two websites, one that describes the anti-abortion mission to secure donors, and one designed for people seeking medical care.¹⁷⁵

The modern-day CPC industry has also embraced social media to target clients. More than 90% of the CPCs examined in this Study are active on social media, especially Facebook.

Though we did not analyze the presence of CPCs on social media

apps TikTok and Snapchat in this Study, digital marketing firms such as “Choose Life Marketing,” which advertises as a Google Partner and Facebook Marketing Partner, show the CPC industry is promoting tactics to target millennials and Gen Z through apps that attract younger users (e.g., Snapchat, YouTube, TikTok) and using Facebook ads to target women who use the dating app Tinder.¹⁷⁶

As another firm specializing in targeting young women and teens deemed “at risk” for abortion noted, CPCs can use social media to “target individuals seeking pregnancy and abortion information online” to give them “the opportunity to ... contact you **first**” (emphasis in original quote).¹⁷⁷



CPCs Gaming Google

Research shows that people living in areas with multiple restrictions on abortion access, or where there are fewer abortion providers, are the most likely to use the internet to search for abortion information and providers.¹⁷⁸

CPCs spend significant sums to advertise on internet search engines.¹⁷⁹ Digital marketing firms that cater to the CPC movement emphasize that the goal is to intercept people searching for abortion care online. As one anti-abortion marketing firm advised, “How do pregnancy centers reach the abortion-minded woman before these abortion pill providers do? ... Through marketing strategies like SEO and PPC, you can rank on top of Google and reach women before abortion providers do.”¹⁸⁰

A 2018 study of the quality of information available for people searching online for abortion information and providers found Google ads were the least likely to facilitate and the most likely to hinder self-referral for abortion. This study found that search results often led to either crisis pregnancy centers or anti-abortion websites regardless of search term or search engine, and that the information quality was lowest in areas with the least access to abortion providers.¹⁸¹

In 2019, in response to criticism, Google enacted a new ad policy designed to require crisis pregnancy centers to be transparent online about not providing abortion care or referrals.¹⁸² But loopholes remain that allow CPCs to continue posting misleading digital ads.¹⁸³ For example, only users who search under the term “abortion” will see the tag “Does not provide abortion” that Google now requires on CPC ads. If a user searches under other terms, like “pregnancy test,” the tag does not appear. Nor does the tag appear on ads placed by the big CPC networks.

CPCs and Mobile Geofencing

Mobile geofencing is a digital marketing strategy that enables advertisers to target people within a specific physical location to receive ads on their phone, so long as they are within the digitally defined parameter. CPCs have set up geofences around abortion clinics to reach people in the waiting room, sending ads to their phones to try to get them to go to the CPC instead. “Be creative with your geofencing,” advises a CPC marketing firm. “You can set it up around high schools, universities, shopping malls, movie theaters, and abortion clinics.”¹⁸⁴

In 2017, the Massachusetts attorney general concluded that this tactic violated consumer protection laws and forced one advertising firm to cease in that state, noting that the technology can be used to “digitally harass people” and that “consumers are entitled to privacy in their medical decisions and conditions.”¹⁸⁵

CPCs Collect Client Data

Anti-abortion umbrella organizations use CPCs to collect and store extensive personal client data. They have leveraged content management systems, centralized hotlines and website chat services, and fertility apps¹⁸⁶ to create “digital dossiers” on every person who interacts with a CPC. Data collected includes the purpose of the client’s visit, demographic data, outcomes of the visit in terms of abortion decision, and status of potential conversion to evangelical Christianity.¹⁸⁷ As discussed below, most CPCs are not subject to federal privacy laws, so the confidentiality, uses, and potential sharing of massive amounts of data about people who visit, call, chat with, or otherwise have contact with a CPC remain unclear.

Get To The Top of Google With These 3 SEO Tips!

With abortion minded women searching for answers online every day, search engine optimization (SEO) is necessary for an effective marketing strategy. Stand out among your competition - your local abortion clinic - and connect with the abortion-minded woman by using SEO the right way.

From blogging to optimization, a great SEO strategy helps you rank on top of Google. The more strategy you put into SEO, the better chance women have coming to your website and ultimately coming into your center.

▶ Screenshot from Choose Life Marketing
https://www.chooselifemarketing.com/marketing_category/client-strategy/

