

Deceptive & Misleading Marketing: Most CPCs Do Not Provide Medical Care

“When I worked in Ohio, a mobile crisis pregnancy center would pull up in front of the abortion clinic at which I provided services. One of the [abortion clinic] staff members, who was most definitely not pregnant, presented to the CPC stating she was pregnant and needed advice. They did not do a pregnancy test to confirm that she was pregnant, but performed an ultrasound. They told her she had a very tiny baby with a heartbeat. They even provided an ultrasound picture of her non-pregnant uterus. These were non-medical professionals telling people who weren’t even pregnant that they were “carrying life.” These centers are practicing medicine without a license, and as a licensed medical professional, I find this appalling.”

—LISA PERRIERA, MD, MPH, Professor, Department of Obstetrics & Gynecology, Thomas Jefferson University, Pennsylvania



Contrary to CPC branding efforts and despite the industry’s recent success in obtaining funds designated for the provision of medical care, the Alliance found medical services comprised the smallest percentage of services offered by CPCs, and that CPCs use some non-medical services to promote inaccurate and misleading information about reproductive health care.

Prenatal, Well-person, and Contraceptive Care

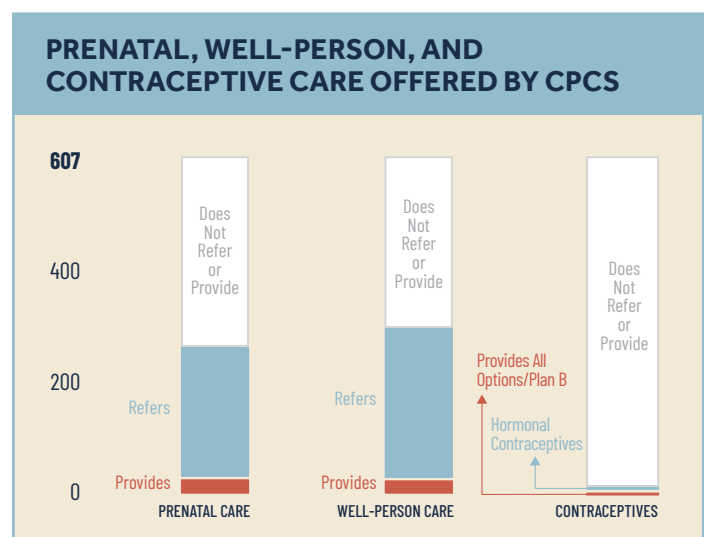
Of 607 CPCs surveyed, 5.1% offered prenatal care and fewer than half (40.2%) referred clients for prenatal care. In Pennsylvania, where one out of every six infants is born to a parent who received inadequate prenatal care,¹²¹ state-funded CPCs offered no prenatal care.

CPCs affiliated with the big CPC networks — almost half (45.8%) of the CPCs in our Study states — offered prenatal care at a lower rate than CPCs overall:



Few CPCs (4.8%) offered well-person care, which we defined as preventive reproductive health services such as breast exams and Pap tests, as well as overall preventive health services, such as physicals. Less than one-third (29.8%) made referrals for well-person care.

Only one of the 607 CPCs in the Study offered FDA-approved contraception, while 3% provided “fertility awareness” and 7.7% offered abstinence programming.



While most public discussion of CPCs focuses on their opposition to abortion, this Study's finding that virtually no CPCs provided contraceptive services is consistent with scholarly research that indicates that CPCs generally oppose the promotion or provision of contraception. A study of online contraceptive information provided by CPCs noted that CPC sites "appeared to discourage contraceptive use by minimizing benefits and emphasizing risks and barriers" and that "none of the sites discussed positive aspects of pregnancy prevention, and none mentioned other health benefits of contraception (e.g., relief from migraines, menstrual pain, and acne)."¹²²

Sexuality "Education"

Almost 17% of CPCs in the Study claimed to offer sexuality education. Online descriptions of these CPC services suggest that calling them sexuality "education" is misleading, as the content typically promoted abstinence-only programming regarding pregnancy avoidance and prevention of sexually transmitted infections; never included information about contraception; and often included medically inaccurate claims.

Sexuality-related content in CPC programs sometimes featured religious and shame-based messages, as well as harmful stereotypes about women, LGBTQ+ youth, and nontraditional families.¹²³ In one example, a Spokane, Washington, CPC promoted a form of LGBTQ+ conversion therapy on its website:

Unwanted Same-Sex Attraction & Gender Identity

In today's post-modern world, many are often defined by gender identity and sexual orientation. And yet for those struggling with same-sex attraction or gender confusion, claiming these identities can create feelings of fear and uncertainty. In isolation, we may try to shove our desires under the rug, and hopelessly believe that we cannot and will never change or experience a joy filled life.

If you are 1) struggling with unwanted same-sex attraction, 2) in a same-sex relationship, or 3) feeling confused in your gender, you are not alone. Path of Life is a Christian organization, providing free and confidential mentoring and support to those struggling with gender identity and/or same sex attraction. You are not bound to a life of hopelessness, guilt and shame, but through the gospel of Jesus, your heart, mind and behaviors can be transformed and healing can be found.

▶ Screenshot from Path of Light CPC, Spokane, WA
<https://www.pathoflifespokane.org/services-1>



Approximately 8% of the Alliance Study CPCs also indicated that they offer sexuality-related services off-site, including in public schools. In some study states, the percentage was much higher: Nearly 20% of CPCs in Washington claim to offer sexuality education off-site.

According to adolescent health professionals, "Young people require comprehensive, medically accurate sexual and reproductive health information and quality, evidence-based clinical services. Programs that exclusively promote sexual abstinence before marriage ... are ineffective, ethically problematic, and might be harmful."¹²⁴

The extent to which public schools and school districts are engaging CPCs to provide sexuality or abstinence-only programming is unknown, nor is it apparent when public education funds are being used to contract with CPCs. Reports of CPCs providing ideologically based, medically inaccurate presentations, classes, courses, and curricula in public schools abound,¹²⁵ including in Alliance Study states.

A school district in New Mexico paid a CPC to provide abstinence-only education until Southwest Women’s Law Center recommended that the governor terminate such contracts.¹²⁶ A Northern California CPC reported receiving a \$450,000 federal grant to continue providing sexuality education in Placer and Nevada county schools before school administrators determined they could no longer contract with the CPC under the state’s Healthy Youth Act mandating comprehensive sexuality education.¹²⁷

There are also indications that CPCs are currently providing these services in public schools in Alliance Study states. In Minnesota, Gender Justice has found evidence of county contracts with CPCs, and in Alaska and Washington, Legal Voice is investigating school districts where CPCs claim to be providing sexuality education.

In Pennsylvania, there is recent direct testimony about the presence of CPCs in public schools. At a hearing in the state legislature in spring 2021, a representative of the Women’s Choice Network testified that her CPC used federal Title X funds and has seven “certified” CPC instructors providing sex education to 14 schools “on a daily basis” in the Pittsburgh area.¹²⁸ This revelation followed a 2018 report from a Pennsylvania-based high school student whistleblower that a representative from a local CPC was invited to speak at her health class.

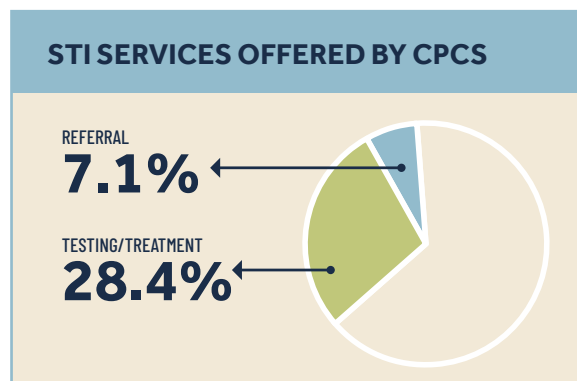


Among other medically inaccurate claims, the speaker advised students to avoid holding hands because any touching would make it harder for them to find a life partner by depleting hormones needed to bond couples. They also gave a student a Bible. The school board said it had no knowledge of this programming.¹²⁹

Sexually Transmitted Infection (STI) Services

Over one-quarter (28.4%) of CPC websites studied offer STI testing. Some CPCs that claimed to offer testing were found to offer STI “self-assessment” questions on their websites, not clinical tests. Just 7.1% referred clients for STI treatment.

The latest available data shows STIs are at an all-time high in the United States, and medical experts warn that some STIs can have serious health consequences including increased risk of HIV infection.¹³⁰ A recent report issued by an anti-abortion organization highlighted the STI crisis while claiming CPCs “provide STI/STD testing and treatment to women, and at some locations to men, in direct response to this public health crisis.”¹³¹ Despite such rhetoric about STI services, most CPCs in this Study did not provide or refer people for STI treatment. Moreover, CPCs consistently oppose contraception and do not offer barrier methods such as condoms, which are a standard of care in STI prevention.



Licensed Medical Professionals on Staff

CPCs increasingly promote their affiliation with licensed medical professionals as part of their effort to present as medical clinics. The Alliance found 16% of CPCs in this Study indicated they had a physician on staff, and just over 25% indicated they had a registered nurse. The

majority surveyed (52.8%) did not provide any information on their websites about whether licensed medical professionals were associated with the CPC.

Scholarly research and the limited public reporting available on licensed professionals at CPCs both indicate that most medical professionals affiliated with CPCs are engaged on a part-time or volunteer basis.¹³² Anecdotal reports also indicate some physicians working with CPCs are licensed in fields unrelated to reproductive health, including as optometrists and chiropractors.¹³³

In sum, despite claims and efforts to present as medical facilities, the Alliance Study found that CPCs offered virtually none of the medical services needed by pregnant people; used some services to promote inaccurate and misleading medical information; and largely did not engage licensed medical professionals on their staff. In fact, by misleadingly presenting themselves as medical facilities, CPCs may systemically obstruct access to medical care.



“In 2002, I was seeking an abortion at age 28, living in Chicago and working as a paralegal. I made an appointment at what I thought was an abortion clinic, but instead of providing me an abortion, the clinic counselors lectured me about the joys of motherhood, made me watch graphic videos of abortion procedures, then presented me with a rattle and a onesie and referred me to another facility for a free ultrasound. At this second appointment, the technician told me, “If you have an abortion now, you’ll perforate your uterus and won’t be able to have children in the future.”

Terrified by the prospect of infertility, I carried the pregnancy to term. Within a year of my son’s birth, I lost my job and health care. The pregnancy clinic I visited never followed up, nor offered support beyond the set of baby toys they’d given me on my first visit. Years later, I realized what had happened to me: I was intentionally lured into a crisis pregnancy center.”

—**Cherisse A. Scott**, CEO & Founder, SisterReach, Tennessee

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