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## Planned Parenthood Funding Cuts Threaten Vital Health Services in the US

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The recent decision to slash federal funding for Planned Parenthood, embedded within President Donald Trump’s sweeping policy and spending package signed on July 4, could see up to 200 clinics shuttered across the United States, according to the organization. This move, part of a broader provision banning Medicaid funding for one year to healthcare providers performing abortions and receiving over \$800,000 in federal reimbursements, is poised to disrupt not only abortion access but also a wide range of essential health services.

Established in 1916, the nonprofit group Planned Parenthood provides reproductive and sexual health care and operates nearly 600 clinics nationwide, serving over 2 million patients annually, as reported by the healthcare policy nonprofit KFF. These clinics provide critical services beyond abortion, including cancer screenings, sexually transmitted infection (STI) testing and treatment, and routine well-woman exams that encompass reproductive health assessments. The majority of its Medicaid reimbursements fund these non-abortion services, with abortion coverage limited to rare cases such as rape, incest, or life-threatening pregnancies.

The funding cut, if enforced, could cripple the organization's ability to deliver preventative and primary care, particularly in rural areas where Planned Parenthood clinics are often the sole providers for Medicaid patients. "The consequences will be dire and compounding for public health," warned Planned Parenthood in a recent lawsuit challenging the measure. The organization argues that clinic closures and staff layoffs will destabilize an already strained healthcare system. In a reprieve, Massachusetts District Judge Indira Talwani granted a two-week pause on the funding cut, with further arguments scheduled for July 21..

Dr. Nisha Verma, senior advisor for reproductive health policy at the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, underscored the gravity of the situation in a recent interview: "The healthcare system is already struggling to care for patients. Losing these clinics will be pretty devastating." The US faces a growing shortage of healthcare providers, with the Association of American Medical Colleges projecting a deficit of 20,200 to 40,400 primary care physicians by 2036. Additionally, a 2021 Department of Health and Human Services report estimates 3,000 fewer obstetricians and gynecologists will be practicing by 2030.

For many, Planned Parenthood fills a critical gap. Stephvonne Steele, a 25-year-old eligibility specialist from Florida, shared her experience: "In 2020, I couldn't sleep due to a worsening yeast infection. Private doctors had waitlists stretching months, but Planned Parenthood saw me within 24 hours. Without them, I'd have been in real trouble." Her story highlights the organization's role in underserved communities, where alternatives are scarce.

Even where other providers exist, they may not absorb the patient influx. Many private OB-GYN practices do not accept Medicaid due to its low reimbursement rates, and federally qualified health centres (FQHCs), while an option, are already stretched thin. Karen Stone, vice president of public policy at Planned Parenthood, warned: "This will exacerbate the

chaos in our fragile reproductive healthcare infrastructure, disrupting access to birth control, cancer screenings, and other essential services.”

The Department of Health and Human Services declined to comment on the ongoing lawsuit. As the legal battle unfolds, the potential loss of Planned Parenthood’s services looms large, threatening to reshape the landscape of primary and reproductive healthcare in America, particularly for those who rely on Medicaid.

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