

# ACCESS TO REPRODUCTIVE HEALTHCARE

POSITION STATEMENT | AUGUST 2022



**Public Health**  
MADISON & DANE COUNTY

*Healthy people. Healthy places.*

## OUR POSITION

Public Health Madison & Dane County believes that access to a full range of equitable and evidence-based reproductive healthcare, including safe and legal abortion, is necessary for healthy and thriving birthing people, children, families, and communities.

## INTRODUCTION

As defined by SisterSong, reproductive justice is “the right to maintain personal bodily autonomy, have children, not have children, and parent the children we have in safe and sustainable communities.”<sup>1</sup> The reproductive justice framework emphasizes and respects birthing people’s right to reproductive dignity and bodily autonomy<sup>2</sup>, as well as unbiased support and unrestricted access to all reproductive options throughout the lifespan.<sup>3,4</sup>

A core component of reproductive justice is equitable reproductive choice for all birthing people.<sup>2</sup> It means that all pregnancy options should be accessible, affordable, and safe, including abortions. Reproductive choice is a determinant of health and wellbeing across the lifespan for birthing people and their families.<sup>5</sup>

Abortion care is a core part of reproductive justice, and access to safe and legal abortion services is a public health issue. Abortion is a common and safe medical procedure. In 2019, nationally almost one in five pregnancies ended in abortion<sup>6</sup>, compared to almost one in ten pregnancies ending in abortion in Wisconsin.<sup>6</sup> Criminalizing abortions does not reduce the need for or stop abortions; instead, it makes abortions unsafe and places the largest burden on people who are already disproportionality impacted by health inequities.<sup>7</sup>

### Background

Throughout history, structural inequities and discrimination have limited the fundamental rights of reproductive choice and bodily autonomy.<sup>2</sup> Birthing people have experienced controlled and limited access to contraception and abortions, in addition to restricted information on accurate family planning options due to biased providers.<sup>2</sup> For many historically marginalized ethnic groups, birthing people have also endured forced sterilization.<sup>2</sup> Laws surrounding reproductive healthcare (or lack thereof) have historically harmed women and birthing people.<sup>2</sup> The high cost of reproductive health services<sup>2</sup> coupled with continued workplace discrimination on the basis of pregnancy and postpartum despite federal protected status<sup>8</sup> have led to financial hardships and social inequities.<sup>2</sup>

Even when abortion has been legally protected to an extent, it has not been accessible to everyone.<sup>1,2</sup> Before 1973, abortion access was severely limited in the United States. Abortions were performed in secret, and people providing these abortions were often not physicians.<sup>9</sup> If someone was unable to pay for an abortion or didn’t have access to a provider, they often had to perform abortions on themselves

(called self-induced abortions). Self-induced and unsafe abortions caused at least 1 in every 6 pregnancy-related deaths.<sup>9,10</sup> In 1973, the U.S. Supreme Court stated in the *Roe v. Wade* decision that the right to an abortion cannot be restricted prior to the viability of the fetus, which was subsequently considered to be around 24 weeks after conception.<sup>11</sup>

On June 24, 2022, the U.S. Supreme Court's ruling on *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* reversed the precedent of *Roe v. Wade* and eliminated the guaranteed constitutional protection of the right to have an abortion.<sup>12</sup> This made the legality of abortions a matter of state law rather than a federally protected right.<sup>12</sup> In Wisconsin, *Roe* had superseded an 1849 statute that makes performing an abortion illegal. The *Dobbs* decision means that this law is once again active and, with the exception of rare circumstances, abortions are again outlawed in Wisconsin.<sup>13</sup> This has dramatically altered the landscape of abortion access in the state, as formerly legal providers of safe abortions are now directing clients to neighboring states.

## Consequences of Abortion Restrictions

There are many potentially harmful consequences<sup>14</sup> when someone is denied an abortion<sup>14</sup>, such as:

- Greater prevalence of serious health problems related to giving birth<sup>5</sup> and substantially greater mortality risk with giving birth compared to legal abortion<sup>7</sup>
- Increased maternal mortality, even if the rate of unsafe abortions does not increase<sup>7</sup>
- Adverse psychological impacts<sup>5</sup>
- Prolonged exposure to domestic violence<sup>5</sup>
- Prolonged years in poverty and exacerbated financial hardships<sup>5</sup>
- Decreased likelihood of achieving life goals, such as completion of postsecondary education<sup>5</sup>
- Worsened child development of existing children, as well as poor maternal bond with the unwanted pregnancy<sup>5</sup>

Restricting and ultimately criminalizing abortion has serious repercussions for the people of Wisconsin, especially those living in rural areas, Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC), and people with low incomes.<sup>15, 16</sup> Poverty already disproportionately affects BIPOC, single mothers, young people, and people who live in rural areas. Restricted access to abortion could exacerbate existing hardships for these vulnerable groups.<sup>17</sup> In Wisconsin, pregnancy-related deaths already disproportionately affect Black, Hispanic, and Asian parents,<sup>18</sup> and banning abortion will further widen maternal mortality inequities.<sup>15, 16</sup>

## MOVING FORWARD

Reproductive choice and bodily autonomy are crucial for a person to have freedom over their life, health, and well-being. Access to a full range of sexual and reproductive health care services, including abortion, is a fundamental right for birthing people and their families, and is essential for advancing community health.

We envision Dane County as a place that values and allows for equitable, open access to reproductive choice by expanding abortion and reproductive services for all, including:

- Free or affordable abortion services<sup>2</sup>
- Public and private insurance coverage for abortion services<sup>19</sup>
- Abortion access without waiting periods or other prerequisites<sup>13</sup>
- Expanded access to birth control, contraceptives, and family planning tools<sup>3</sup>
- Increased availability and unrestricted provider use of evidence-based, all-options counseling<sup>3</sup>

Reproductive justice includes not only abortion, but also the full range of sexual and reproductive health and life choices. Reproductive all-options health care includes parenting resources, adoption, sex education, birth control, family planning tools, and medical care before, during, and after pregnancy.<sup>3</sup> The choice to terminate a pregnancy should be a person's fundamental right, as should the choice to have children and parent those children. All people should have equitable access to evidence-based, comprehensive reproductive health care services.

In addition to reproductive all-options health care, Public Health Madison & Dane County supports equitable access to health services and education for people of all ages to establish healthy, sustainable communities. We recommend and support proactive, evidence-based policies and practices imperative to advancing community health and reducing existing disparities, including:

- Affordable prenatal care, birth, postpartum care, and contraception, as well as a livable wage and affordable childcare<sup>2</sup>
- Adequate support during pregnancy and the postpartum period including safe housing, culturally-responsive care<sup>2</sup>, and comprehensive workplace protection<sup>8</sup>
- Access to prenatal and postpartum nurse home visitors such as Nurse-Family Partnership (NFP)<sup>20</sup> and Prenatal Care Coordination (PNCC)<sup>21</sup>
- Access to medical testing and intervention without risk of criminal prosecution or coercion regarding pregnancy decisions<sup>2</sup>
- Evidence-based, comprehensive, and age appropriate sex education<sup>22</sup>

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## APPROVAL

The Public Health Madison & Dane County Executive Team has reviewed this document and endorse it as an official position of Public Health Madison & Dane County:

Approval Date:

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The Board of Health for Madison and Dane County has reviewed this document and endorse it as an official Public Health Madison & Dane County Policy and/or Procedure:

Approval Date:

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