

## Advocacy Resource

# Birth Control and Religious Liberty

NCJW supports universal access to high quality, affordable, accessible, and comprehensive care — including sexual and reproductive health care — and to the insurance coverage necessary to access these critical services. Our advocates have fought for the Affordable Care Act's (ACA) birth control benefit, which has allowed an estimated 62 million people to access no-cost contraception, for nearly a decade. However, attacks on the coverage mandate through religious and moral exemptions have jeopardized patient health, safety, and religious liberty. **NCJW values every person as a moral agent with the capacity, right, and responsibility to decide for themselves, based on their own beliefs, whether and when to use birth control.**

- **As with all necessary care, access to birth control is a matter of health equity and social and economic justice.** Contraceptive use enables proper family planning and can help people manage or treat conditions including diabetes, heart disease, excessive menstrual bleeding, and pre-menstrual syndrome. With access to birth control, individuals are also better able to reach their employment and education goals and to support their families, improving their emotional well-being and economic security. Unfortunately, the high cost of birth control has meant that many — particularly low-income people, people of color, young people, and LGBTQ individuals already facing multiple barriers to care — cannot access it consistently without insurance coverage. Ensuring coverage of all methods of birth control removes a financial barrier to patients getting the care that best suits their needs.
- **Birth control is a moral good used and supported by people of faith.** More than 99% of sexually active women of all religious denominations have used at least one method of contraception; this includes 89 percent of Catholics and 90 percent of Protestants at risk for unintended pregnancy. In the Jewish tradition, methods of birth control were known and used with permission even in the Talmudic era. Many Jewish denominations frequently permit contraceptive use while considering the ability of the couple to support children, the welfare of existing children, and the health and emotional needs of the partner at risk for unintended pregnancy. And, regardless of personal birth control use, almost 70 percent of Americans believe that individuals should be able to make reproductive health care decisions without interference from politicians or bosses. As Jews, we have an obligation to care for our bodies and to ensure all others can do the same. Given the benefits associated with contraceptive use — lowering rates of unintended pregnancy, planning and spacing pregnancies to avoid premature or low birth weight, allowing patients to complete their education and to get or keep jobs — advocating for coverage of this essential care clearly aligns with this calling.
- **Religious freedom is not a license to impose one's beliefs on others or to obstruct or coerce the exercise of another's conscience.** NCJW believes our reproductive freedoms are integrally bound to our religious liberty and is committed to advancing the goals of reproductive justice so every person can make moral and faith-informed decisions about their body, health, and family free from restrictions and stigma. As many people's contraceptive use is informed by their religious beliefs, denying them access to contraception is a violation of their religious freedom, privileging the views of some over others in violation of the First Amendment. Jewish tradition affirms that access to birth control is a matter of human rights and basic human dignity.