



# The Texas Policy Evaluation Project

## Low-Income Women's Attitudes About Affordable Family Planning Services

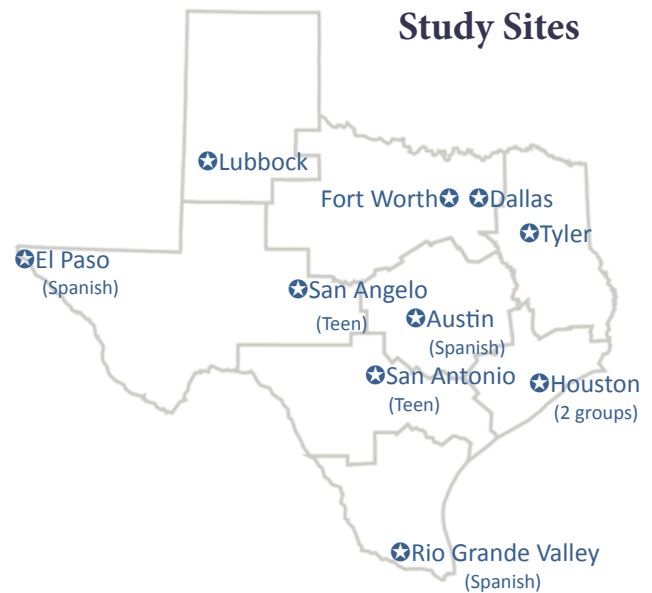
### Research Brief

#### THE STUDY

This research brief highlights the experiences of low-income women and teens who tried to obtain affordable family planning services in Texas following the family planning budget cuts that went into effect in September 2011.

We conducted at least one focus group in every public health district of Texas for a total of 11 focus groups: 9 adult women groups (6 conducted in English and 3 in Spanish) and 2 teen girl groups (both in English).

Participants were recruited through organizations that serve low-income populations. Overall, 92 women and 15 teens participated in the groups.



#### FINDINGS

1. Low-income women find that **affordable family planning services are very difficult to access**, and free services are virtually nonexistent. However, women covered by Medicaid are an exception, as they can easily access these important preventive care services.

*"I used to go to the Planned Parenthood, but now supposedly there's no funding. I think they charged me the regular fee." -Rio Grande Valley (translated from Spanish)*

2. Women noted that **previously free services now require payment**. Because of this, some women said they are having more difficulty obtaining their birth control method. For instance:

*"Now they're charging for everything. ... Birth control pills used to be free. They gave you refills without a problem. You got a two or three months' supply. You didn't have to worry about all that." -Dallas*

They also commented that they now forego other preventive health care, like cervical cancer screenings, because they are unable to pay the new fees.

*"That's the ugly truth, you don't even go. If you do go, more than likely there is not a payment plan method that you can pay. They want all their money at the end of that visit or they can't see you."-Dallas*

3. Women also expressed frustration that it is **easier to obtain pregnancy-related services than contraception** and reproductive health services. Women voiced dismay that they were not better supported in their efforts to prevent pregnancy and support the children they have.

*"All of our programs are set [that] if I just go and get pregnant then all of my kids would qualify for the Medicaid. I'd get more food stamps. You are really rewarded for being pregnant and not having jobs."*

*-Lubbock*

## Attitudes About Affordable Access

4. Women recounted a variety of **negative consequences due to the limited coverage and patchwork of services** for family planning services in Texas. These included lack of continuity of care in order to find the cheapest option when services are needed; missing postpartum visits because Medicaid coverage expired; aging out of comprehensive teen family planning programs and having nowhere to go as a young adult; the inability to get preventive screening services like Pap smears after becoming sterilized; and becoming pregnant while trying to find affordable services.

*“I have six kids. After the one I had last year, I had actually missed my six week checkup and when I called to reschedule, my Medicaid had fallen and my doctor wouldn’t see me. When I was able to figure out everything to finally do it again, I was already pregnant again. That caused an avalanche of so many troubles. It was all because I didn’t do it fast enough.” -Lubbock*

*“When I was pregnant and I was on Medicaid, they gave me Yaz after I had my baby, but they only gave you like six months [of pill packs] and Medicaid ends three months after you have your kid. So, I didn’t have money to go back and that’s when I got pregnant with my second child.” -Houston*

5. Teens said that requiring **parental consent is a barrier to obtaining family planning** and other services. However, this attitude does not seem to be the result of the budget cuts, as Texas teens were concerned about their parents and other adults knowing that they are sexually active.

*“There’s quite a few girls [at my school] that want to get the pill or get any type of contraceptive, but ... their parents find it as going against God. So it’s a big issue for a lot of them.” -San Antonio*

6. All groups of low-income women and teens expressed **very strong support for government assistance for family planning**. They believe that it would make more sense for the government to help women prevent unintended pregnancies because, if not, the government will spend even more money on other services for those additional children.

*“If they’re willing to give women family planning services such as birth control and what have you, then they don’t have children that they can’t afford to support and then the government ends up supporting those children anyway.” -Fort Worth*

## CONCLUSIONS

The funding cuts have exacerbated the challenges low income women and teens in Texas already faced trying to access contraceptive and preventive reproductive health screenings. Indeed, we found that now more than ever disadvantaged women must choose between getting contraception and meeting other immediate economic needs. Low income women and teens would benefit from an expansion of free and affordable services so that they can consistently access services. This would enable them to take personal responsibility for their health and prevent unintended pregnancies.



A team of researchers at the Population Research Center, the University of Texas at Austin, in collaboration with researchers at the University of Alabama at Birmingham and Ibis Reproductive Health, is studying the impact of Texas state’s legislation on women’s reproductive health services, enacted during the 2011 legislative session.

More details about the study can be found on the project website: [www.utexas.edu/cola/orgs/txpep](http://www.utexas.edu/cola/orgs/txpep)  
For local estimates of the impact of the family planning budget cuts, visit our web app at: [www.prc.utexas.edu/txpep/](http://www.prc.utexas.edu/txpep/)