



MONTANANS FOR CHOICE

Unregulated Pregnancy Centers in Montana

How Anti-Abortion Centers Cause Harm

What is an Unregulated Pregnancy Center?

An unregulated pregnancy center (UPC) is a community organization that often presents as a medical clinic or community resource center. Their primary purpose is to dissuade pregnant individuals from accessing abortion care.

There are close to 3,000 UPCs throughout the United States, posing as a low-cost resource for people facing an unintended pregnancy. Sometimes called “pregnancy resource centers,” “crisis pregnancy centers,” “anti-abortion centers,” or “fake clinics,” these unregulated centers do NOT provide comprehensive reproductive healthcare. Less than half are staffed by licensed medical professionals, while only 5% offer prenatal services.^[1] What they do offer is shame, stigma, misinformation, and coercion designed specifically to delay and disrupt abortion care. Despite their presentation as community based and low budget, most UPCs are well-funded, with 75% of those based in the U.S. affiliated with larger anti-abortion networks, like Heartbeat International and CareNet.^[2]

How do people end up at these unregulated pregnancy centers?

UPCs infiltrate the medical care landscape using deceptive names and branding, online advertisements, and search engine optimization, so that someone looking for an abortion provider near them would see the UPC listing first.^{[3][4]} These centers’ websites often refer to reproductive health services and may mention abortion or abortion education as one of their services, making it easy to assume a person can receive abortion care or at least a referral. They promote appointments offering free pregnancy tests and ultrasounds to get people through their doors, with no intention of offering them comprehensive or judgment-free healthcare.

Other individuals who plan to keep their pregnancy may respond to a UPC that prominently advertises free support for expecting parents. And while many do offer maternity and baby supplies, such as diapers, it is often in exchange for participation in unlicensed counseling sessions or ideological classes, including bible studies or abstinence seminars. UPCs seek out pregnant people, but they do not exist to help them long term with supporting their families.^{[2] [5]}

 **NBC NEWS**

EXCLUSIVE

ABORTION RIGHTS

Watchdog group asks 5 attorneys general to investigate crisis pregnancy center privacy practices

The group, the Campaign for Accountability, alleges that the centers collect sensitive medical data from patients and may mislead them about data privacy.



Photo source: Indivisible Mass Coalition



Photo source: Indivisible Mass Coalition

REALITY★CHECK**Is Idaho pregnancy center keeping patient data private? Complaint asks AG to investigate**

By Nicole Blanchard

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How do unregulated pregnancy centers harm those seeking abortion care?

UPCs encourage individuals to confirm their pregnancy and/or the gestational age of their pregnancy by making an appointment at the center. This appointment can delay the pregnant individual's contact with an abortion provider and/or access to other healthcare. At these appointments, UPCs have been documented to mislead pregnant individuals by lying about the gestational age of their pregnancy and/or leading them to believe that it's either too early to have an abortion or too late to have a legal abortion in their state. These lies may be intentional deception or the result of untrained and uncertified volunteers performing and interpreting "non-diagnostic" ultrasounds.^[2]

A known anti-abortion tactic is to lie about the health risks of abortion, stating inaccurately that it causes breast cancer, infertility, substance misuse, and/or suicide. As medication abortion and telehealth become more widely used, this tactic is also used to cast doubt on the safety of taking abortion pills at home.^[6] These scare tactics are often paired with stigmatizing and shaming language designed to create doubt and guilt. Ultimately, their goal is to dissuade pregnant individuals from considering an abortion.

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And finally, as some states move to restrict abortion access even further by punishing individuals seeking abortion care, fake clinics are increasingly on the frontlines of surveillance for the anti-abortion movement. Some states have even proposed using UPCs as a key source to set up registries of people "at risk for seeking an abortion."^[7] Since many of these centers are not licensed medical providers, they don't have to keep people's information private and they may intentionally collect personal data through intake forms and "counseling," that could be used in pregnancy- and abortion-related prosecutions.^{[5] [8] [9]}

There have been documented instances of UPCs invoking HIPAA in their privacy policies, suggesting that client information is protected under HIPAA, while knowing HIPAA doesn't actually apply to them. Recently, Health and Human Services investigated an affiliate of Heartbeat International for revealing the personal health information of 13 clients via publicly available training videos, without obtaining consent from these individuals. Heartbeat International is America's largest crisis pregnancy organization, with thousands of affiliates throughout the U.S., including four in Montana located in Billings, Lewiston, Libby, and Missoula.^{[10] [11]}

WHO DO UNREGULATED PREGNANCY CENTERS HARM?

Those who live in rural areas, people of color, and those experiencing poverty often have less access to healthcare and fewer options for comprehensive care. These groups are aggressively targeted by anti-abortion organizations, with some UPCs using their claim that they offer services to under-resourced communities as a justification for federal grant funding. These underserved populations already face exorbitant barriers to accessing healthcare; UPCs exacerbate barriers disproportionately for these communities. Many people also seek out UPCs because they cannot afford diapers or other infant and maternity goods that UPCs claim to offer for free. Because these goods often come in exchange for participation in religious classes and ideological counseling, even those that intend to remain pregnant face coercion, judgement, and stigma.^[5]

Are there unregulated pregnancy centers in Montana?

Yes. Recent studies identified 20 UPCs operating in Montana, outnumbering abortion care clinics more than 3 to 1. Approximately 35% of these UPCs are affiliated with the anti-abortion organization, Care Net. Another 20% are affiliated with Heartbeat International.

The services most often provided by UPCs in Montana include

- Free or earned goods (such as diapers) (95%)
- Support or counseling (95%)
- Pregnancy testing (85%)
- “Non-diagnostic” ultrasounds (60%)

A study by the Alliance for State Advocates found that 75% of Montana’s UPCs make false or biased claims about pregnancy and abortion on their websites. Over 40% of Montana’s UPCs are following national trends by promoting the medically unproven practice of “abortion pill reversal.” The safety and effectiveness of this practice are both unproven, with medical experts calling the practice unethical and experimental. Very few of Montana UPCs offered health services such as STI-related services or well-person care. Only 10% offered any form of prenatal care, confirming the purpose of these centers is not to support pregnant people, but to advance an anti-abortion agenda.^[12]

WHAT ARE “NON-DIAGNOSTIC” ULTRASOUNDS?

Also known as “keepsake” or “souvenir” ultrasounds, “non-diagnostic” ultrasounds offer absolutely no medical benefit to the pregnant person. They cannot determine gestational age, study placenta or amniotic fluid. They cannot detect emergency conditions such as ectopic pregnancy, fetal distress, or fetal abnormality. As with most UPC practices, these ultrasounds are intended to dissuade pregnant individuals from having an abortion. They have no medical benefit to the pregnant person or fetus, but may give the pregnant person a false sense of security and potentially delay their search for legitimate medical care.^{[13] [14]}

Where are the unregulated pregnancy centers in Montana?

The majority are located in underserved communities. A recent study examining the locations of UPCs identified 18 brick and mortar clinics and five mobile units in Montana – with UPCs outnumbering abortion clinics 3.8 to 1. There are currently 17 counties with UPCs compared to only five counties with abortion clinics. Montana’s abortion clinics are located in five of the most populous counties in the state, and each of these counties also had at least one UPC. The majority of UPCs are located in counties with large underserved populations. Many of these are rural and frontier counties where residents tend to have worse health outcomes and face significant barriers to care, including an absence of providers, concerns about privacy, and lack of health insurance. Notably, UPCs are three times more likely to exist in close proximity to Indigenous communities than are abortion clinics. By posing as a reputable healthcare clinic, yet offering few if any medical services, these fake clinics exacerbate health disparities, including those related to maternal health outcomes.^[15]



So how do unregulated pregnancy centers in Montana stay in business?

According to data tracked by ProPublica, from 2018-2022 the Gianforte Family Charitable Trust donated more than \$4.1 million to anti-abortion entities, including a combined \$1.7 million to UPCs in Montana. This occurred while Governor Gianforte served as a U.S. Representative and later as Governor of Montana.^[16]

In 2022, 7% of all donations made by the Gianforte Family Charitable Trust were made to anti-abortion organizations (\$746,500 out of \$11,318,318). These donations are aligned with Gianforte’s actions as Governor. Within his first year as Governor, he signed three bills that would have restricted abortion access, including a 20-week abortion ban. (That ban was blocked and later ruled unconstitutional by a Montana judge.^[17])

Governor Gianforte has also made contributions to unregulated pregnancy centers an official part of his gubernatorial duties. Montana.gov reported in both 2024 and 2023 that Governor Gianforte gave a quarter of his annual salary to UPCs in Montana as part of his annual 12 Days of Giving campaign to organizations “serving Montanans in need”.^[18, 19]



Photo source: news.mt.gov/Governors-Office

Stay Informed

- Know where you can access abortion care from licensed providers in Montana by visiting Montana Abortion Access Programs (<https://mtabortion.org/where-can-i-access-abortion-care/>)
- Read the Reproductive Health Access Project (RHAP)'s guide on how to spot and avoid fake abortion clinics (<https://www.reproductiveaccess.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/2023-05-How-to-Spot-Fake-Abortion-Clinics.pdf>)
- Join Abortion Access Front's movement to expose unregulated fake clinics at <https://www.exposefakeclinics.com/>
- Check out the Charley Chatbot (<https://www.chatwithcharley.org/>) if you're trying to figure out how to get abortion care without getting scammed by an anti-abortion center

DESIGNED to DECEIVE

A STUDY OF THE **CRISIS PREGNANCY CENTER INDUSTRY** IN NINE STATES

ALASKA
CALIFORNIA
IDAHO
MINNESOTA
MONTANA
NEW MEXICO
OREGON
PENNSYLVANIA
WASHINGTON

Photo source: genderjustice.us



Photo source: pexels.com

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Supporting your autonomy, strengthening our community