How Does Trump's Expanded "Global Gag Rule" Affect Global Health?

Foreign groups, including AIDS organizations, can't receive U.S. funds if they even discuss abortion. Here's a review of that policy.

February 26, 2018 By Trent Straube

When President Trump first took office in 2017, he reinstated and expanded on a policy that restricts foreign organizations from receiving U.S. funding if they provide, or even discuss, abortions. This month, the State Department offered a review of the expanded policy, officially titled Protecting Life in Global Health Assistance (PLGHA) policy but better known as the Trump Global Gag Rule among HIV and sexual health advocates.

The State Department's review has been criticized by Planned Parenthood, Human Rights Watch, U.S. lawmakers and others for painting an incomplete and rosy picture of a scenario that is costing lives.

"The report shows this Administration's incompetence when it comes to global health," said Serra Sippel, president of the Center for Health and Gender Equity (CHANGE), in a press release denouncing the review. "The administration cannot know how many organizations have lost funding because of this policy because it did not conduct a full review. Despite peer-reviewed research that documents its harm, the Trump Administration expanded a policy that puts lives at risk."

Below are a few examples of other criticism of the State Department's review:

"This incomplete review tells a misleading story that President Trump wants the public to hear. The truth is that the effects of the #globalgagrule will be far reaching and deadly." Our stmt on @StateDept's 6-month review of the #GGR: https://t.co/d4EWocd7QA

— PP Global (@ppglobe) February 8, 2018

#TrumpGlobalGag puts life-saving care out of reach for vulnerable families around the world. In Kenya, Family Health Options was forced to close a clinic & cancel 100+ outreach events, including family planning services, cancer screenings & HIV testing. https://t.co/TcPOGxavzP

— Rep. Barbara Lee (@RepBarbaraLee) February 8, 2018

We know that #TrumpGlobalGag in past forced health clinics to reduce services & even close altogether, putting women at risk of #unintendedpregnancy, #unsafeabortion & #maternaldeath. https://t.co/XL4zgDELij

— Guttmacher Institute (@Guttmacher) February 8, 2018

Yet in its review of Trump #GlobalGagRule, @StateDept omitted that clinics are once again shutting down &

does not address predicted impacts on people losing critical health services. #maternalhealth

— Guttmacher Institute (@Guttmacher) February 8, 2018

But what exactly is the global gag rule? As POZ's Casey Halter explained in a February 2017 feature:

> The global gag rule, also known as the Mexico City Policy, is a Reagan-era executive order originally announced in 1984 (at the 2nd International Conference on Population in Mexico City) that restricts any foreign nongovernmental organization, or NGO, that receives U.S. funding from using any money to provide abortions, refer their clients to abortion services or advocate for women's right to choose in their own countries.
>
> Since then, the controversial rule has become a political volleyball between the Republican and Democratic parties. The rule was rescinded by President Bill Clinton in 1993, reinstated by President George W. Bush in 2001 and once again revoked by President Barack Obama via executive order in 2009.
>
> Therefore, when President Trump reinstated the rule on his first day in office in 2017, it didn't exactly come as a surprise to those working in the global health services arena. So why are AIDS advocates up in arms about it?
>
> Here's why: … Past versions of the Mexico City Policy applied only to NGOs seeking to receive special U.S. family planning funding—about $600 million worth of foreign aid. But President Trump specifically changed the wording in his 2017 executive order to extend the abortion gag to all global health funding. That means $9.5 billion worth of foreign aid could now be subject to strict rules that allow the U.S. government to pull its support from any NGO that has provided so much as a referral to any woman seeking to terminate her pregnancy.

In an article in Bustle this month about the recent review of the gag rule, Planned Parenthood Global's communications officer Stuart J. Sia, said, "The State Department's report intentionally shares misleading data to support the Trump-Pence Administration's agenda to curb women's health rights around the world.

Meanwhile, Human Rights Watch offers a helpful look at the global gag rule's harmful effects. Including this short video:

In related news, this POZ feature highlights how HIV scientists and advocates are waging a powerful war against the global epidemic despite potential budget cutbacks and flat-funding.

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