

# Strategies for Title X Providers to Address Clients' Barriers to Accessing Family Planning

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People looking to receive family planning and other sexual and reproductive health (SRH) services can face many barriers to receiving this care, including limited appointment times due to staffing shortages, the need to take time off of work or school, a lack of transportation, a lack of child care, community-level stigma around family planning, a lack of SRH knowledge, and concerns about privacy and confidentiality.

This tip sheet highlights some actions for Title X family planning providers to address their clients' reported barriers to accessing SRH care. These items are drawn from Child Trends' interviews with staff from more than 40 Title X clinics—the only federal grant program dedicated to providing free or low-cost comprehensive family planning services at clinics across the United States—to better understand how providers perceive and respond to clients' social barriers to access.

## Action Items



**Barrier: Clients have limited knowledge and awareness of available family planning services.**



**Strategy: Title X clinics can partner with schools and other community organizations to deliver SRH education to youth.**

- Provide services and deliver SRH education by partnering with schools and with organizations that work with underserved youth (e.g., those who are homeless, in foster care, involved with the juvenile justice system, domestic violence survivors, and those in treatment for substance use).
- Work with schools to present information about sexual health, relationship safety, birth control, and prevention of sexually transmitted infections, or STIs (as allowed by school and state regulations).
- If clinics are not able to directly engage in knowledge building in schools, they should reach out to individual school staff, such as school nurses, to provide referrals and ensure the provision of medically accurate information.



**Strategy: Title X clinics can build visibility and relationships in the community to raise awareness about clinic services.**

- Build relationships with community members to allow people to feel that the clinic is a safe and trusted place.
- Share information about the clinic and connect people with services by partnering with churches, residential treatment facilities, homeless shelters, soup kitchens, domestic violence shelters, community associations, local drug coalitions, and others.

- Try to reach a wide variety of community members by visiting the places where people regularly spend time, such as schools, laundromats, gas stations, hair salons, food banks, churches, libraries, and community centers.
- Maintain a visible presence in the community by attending, participating in, and/or hosting health fairs, festivals, or other events to conduct health screenings, provide education, distribute condoms, and schedule appointments.
- Consider locations or special events that may be well-attended by particular groups or populations in the broader community who face unique barriers to accessing SRH care.
- Have dedicated community health workers or outreach workers who can raise awareness about and connect people with family planning services.
- Consider whether staff who conduct intakes at the clinic can also do community outreach; this will allow people who choose to access services after a community encounter to be greeted by a familiar face at the clinic.



**Strategy: Title X clinics can advertise their free and low-cost services through a variety of mediums.**

- Use a combination of traditional advertising (e.g., posters, brochures, and flyers; newspaper and radio advertisements; billboards in town and on local buses; commercials in movie theaters) and website and social media outreach (e.g., websites, Facebook, Instagram, email newsletters).
- Include critical information in advertisements, including the availability of no-cost services or services on a sliding payment scale.
- Get people's attention through advertising—for instance, by attaching condoms to flyers.
- Use social media to let people know where a clinic is located and what services the clinic offers.

**Other resources:**

- [Engaging Your Community: A Toolkit for Partnership, Collaboration, and Action Job Aid | Reproductive Health National Training Center \(rhntc.org\)](https://www.rhntc.org/engaging-your-community)
- [Facilitator's Kit: Community Preparedness for Reproductive Health and Gender | Women's Refugee Commission \(womensrefugeecommission.org\)](https://www.womensrefugeecommission.org/facilitator-kit)
- [Reproductive health awareness: an important dimension to be integrated into existing sexual and reproductive health programs - PubMed \(nih.gov\)](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/)
- [Promoting Family Planning Services Social Media Toolkit | Reproductive Health National Training Center \(rhntc.org\)](https://www.rhntc.org/promoting-family-planning-services-social-media-toolkit)



**Barrier: Clients experience stigma around receiving family planning services and adolescents have unique privacy and confidentiality needs.**



**Strategy: Title X clinics can set up clinic spaces to promote clients' physical sense of privacy.**

- Consider redesigning clinic spaces to enhance clients' sense of physical privacy—for example, by having family planning services integrated with other specialties rather than separated out.
- Provide contraception directly to clients who are concerned about their privacy at the local pharmacy.
- Address clients' concerns about being seen (or having their car be seen) at the clinic.

- Take steps to protect clients' privacy outside of the clinic. Some clinics offer an alternate sister clinic location, while others recommend that clients park farther away.



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**Strategy: Title X clinics can educate adolescent clients on their privacy rights.**

- Inform adolescents of their [rights under Title X](#) during outreach in schools and other settings: Understanding their privacy rights can be an important first step to adolescents feeling comfortable seeking services.
- Educate adolescents and parents on adolescents' legal rights to privacy and confidentiality.
- Ask parents to leave the exam room at certain points to allow adolescents confidential access to the information and services they need.



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**Strategy: Title X clinics can implement parallel charts to increase adolescents' confidentiality protection.**

- Understand whether adolescents have heightened confidentiality concerns and whether youth want the clinic to bill their health insurance.
- Create parallel patient charts that are not shared with parents or guardians. Normally, parents or guardians have access to their minor children's medical records, but parallel charts help protect the confidentiality of adolescent clients' Title X services, as is done with birth control or STI testing.
- Do not bill parents' insurance and don't make reminder phone calls for visits booked under parallel charts. This can benefit clients of any age who need an additional layer of confidentiality around their family planning care.

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**Other resources:**

- [Patient Experience Improvement Toolkit | Reproductive Health National Training Center \(rhntc.org\)](#)
- [Adolescent-Centered Virtual Care eLearning | Reproductive Health National Training Center \(rhntc.org\)](#)
- [Confidentiality in Adolescent Health Care | ACOG](#)
- [Infographic: Teens Visiting Health Clinic | CDC](#)
- [Youth-friendly services \(Adolescent Health Initiative\)](#)
- [Video on Youth-Friendly Clinics \(Adolescent Health Initiative\)](#)



**Barrier: Clients have fears and have misconceptions about family planning visits and contraceptive methods.**



**Strategy: Title X clinics can educate clients on the range of contraceptive options and associated safety and side effects.**

- Take time to help clients understand more about family planning and the range of options available to them.
- Instead of relying on providers for contraceptive counseling, dedicate reproductive care coordinators to spend time with clients until they feel heard and comfortable. Ensure that clients have the information they want and need to make educated contraceptive choices.
- Use a peer educator to facilitate workshops that educate clients on the range of contraceptive options and reduce their fears.



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**Strategy: Title X clinics can practice patient-centered approaches that emphasize clients' control during visits and procedures.**

- Validate patients' fears and concerns during visits and procedures.
  - Increase clients' sense of control. Give them options to move through the exam at a slower pace, or even to reschedule their appointment if they become too uncomfortable.
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**Other resources:**

- [Contraception \(CDC\)](#)
- [Contraceptive Counseling and Education eLearning \(rhntc.org\)](#)
- [Contraceptive Performance Measures: Striving for Patient-Centered Contraceptive Access Webinar | Reproductive Health National Training Center \(rhntc.org\)](#)
- [Patient Experience Improvement Toolkit | Reproductive Health National Training Center \(rhntc.org\)](#)



**Barrier: Clients feel pressures around contraceptive method choice.**



**Strategy: Title X clinics can take a patient-centered approach to understanding clients' needs and wants.**

- Focus on clients' needs and wants. Validate their contraceptive preferences and ask if they'd like information about any other methods.
  - Emphasize bodily autonomy during clinic visits.
  - Ask questions about historical, cultural, or religious factors that frame how clients view contraceptive methods.
  - Ask questions related to clients' lifestyle and contraceptive method preferences.
  - Ask questions about clients' relationships to assess safety concerns like potential intimate partner violence or reproductive coercion.
  - In situations where clients need to ensure their partner will not discover their contraceptive method, discuss the most discrete methods—for example, placing an IUD and cutting the IUD strings very short.
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**Strategy: Title X clinics should change or remove clients' contraceptive methods when requested.**

- Work with clients to switch or stop contraceptive methods without judgement if they are not happy with their current method.
  - Communicate to clients that they can have long-acting reversible contraceptive (LARC) methods removed at any time.
  - Conduct LARC removals when requested.
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**Strategy: Title X clinics can be aware of third parties who could unduly influence clients' decisions about contraceptive methods.**

- Be deliberate about who is present in the exam room with the client (e.g., a parent or partner) and emphasize to the client that their decision on contraceptive choice is confidential.
- Bring the client into the patient room alone at first to prevent a possible coercive situation and protect confidentiality.

- Increase clients' awareness of confidential clinic services.
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**Other resources:**

- [Patient Centered Contraceptive Counseling \(ACOG\)](#)
- [Person-Centered Reproductive Counseling Toolkit | Every Body Texas](#)
- [CAP 5-Steps of Contraceptive Counseling Model \(contraceptiveactionplan.org\)](#)
- [Beyond the Pill \(UCSF\)](#)
- [Sample patient bill of rights \(rhntc.org\)](#)



**Barrier: Clients face racism, discrimination, and bias.**



**Strategy: Title X clinics can educate staff about racism and bias.**

- Implement staff trainings to promote racial equity and inclusion to address staff members' beliefs, biases, and behaviors, as well as clients' fears and mistrust rooted in medical racism.
  - Conduct an audit of language and terms used on clinic forms that may be offensive or outdated.
  - Recognize existing health care disparities, as well as institutional racism in the health care system.
  - Be deliberate about building trust of the people for whom you care.
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**Strategy: Title X clinics can hire staff from the populations they serve.**

- Hire staff who share racial or cultural identities with clinic clients to promote comfort, trust, and understanding among clients—especially those from communities of color.
  - Prioritize having racial/ethnic representation at multiple levels of staff.
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**Strategy: Title X clinics can use feedback forms and connect with clients to measure respect and promote comfort.**

- Use feedback forms to measure if patients feel they are being treated with respect.
  - Implement patient-centered care practices to connect with clients, build rapport, and prioritize client comfort.
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**Other resources:**

- [Cultural Competency in Family Planning Care eLearning | Reproductive Health National Training Center \(rhntc.org\)](#)
- [Structures & Self: Advancing Equity and Justice eLearning | Reproductive Health National Training Center \(rhntc.org\)](#)
- [Understanding Bias | Reproductive Health National Training Center \(rhntc.org\)](#)
- [Think Cultural Health. Culturally Competent Nursing Care: A Cornerstone of Caring eLearning | Reproductive Health National Training Center \(rhntc.org\)](#)
- [Contraceptive Performance Measures: Striving for Patient-Centered Contraceptive Access Webinar | Reproductive Health National Training Center \(rhntc.org\)](#)



## Barrier: Clients have limited access to family planning services.



### Strategy: Title X clinics can offer child care for patients.

- Use the waiting room as a daycare center and recruit and train volunteers to care for children while parents receive services.
- Use Medical Reserve Corps volunteers to provide child care.
- Allow people to receive services via telehealth appointments.



### Strategy: Title X clinics can facilitate transportation to appointments.

- Provide gas cards, bus passes, and/or taxi vouchers to clients.
- Arrange or provide rides for clients.
- Connect eligible clients to Medicaid transportation options.
- Use mobile units or satellite locations to take services to people, or send practitioners to partner organizations, including local jails, women's/family shelters, homeless shelters, probation offices, soup kitchens, and rehab facilities.
- Mail contraception to clients.
- Offer telehealth visits, especially for follow-up visits that do not require in-person interactions.



### Strategy: Title X clinics can facilitate appointments for adolescents during the school day or host teen nights.

- Make appointments available at times that are accessible to adolescents and that help maintain their privacy. Facilitate school-day appointments by adjusting the clinic schedule to accommodate adolescents during their lunch hours.
- Offer telehealth appointments for adolescents who cannot travel to the clinic.
- Encourage school districts to allow students to check out for clinic visits with the school counselor instead of the front office. This way, students' whereabouts can be accounted for but there is no risk of the front office notifying parents.



### Strategy: Title X clinics can extend clinic hours.

- Offer early (~7 am) and/or late appointments (~6-8:30 pm) at least once a week/month, or offer Saturday appointments.
- Use feedback surveys to determine which days/hours to offer.
- Offer walk-in appointments, same-day appointments, and open-access scheduling.

#### Other resources:

- [Reducing Barriers in Access to Care Virtual Tour \(rhntc.org\)](https://rhntc.org/reducing-barriers-in-access-to-care-virtual-tour)
- [Using Data to Increase Clinic Efficiency: A Quality Improvement Guide \(rhntc.org\)](https://rhntc.org/using-data-to-increase-clinic-efficiency-a-quality-improvement-guide)
- [Telehealth Visit Staffing and Steps Sample Outline \(rhntc.org\)](https://rhntc.org/telehealth-visit-staffing-and-steps-sample-outline)
- [Promising practices for increasing access to transportation in rural communities](#)
- [Sexual and Reproductive Health Toolkit for Adolescent Providers](#)

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