

Title X: a sure-fire investment with at least a 300% return

If Title X were a stock, it would be every analyst's top pick. Enacted more than 30 years ago, Title X of the Public Health Service Act provides family planning and other preventive reproductive health services to millions of low-income women in the United States. This year's budgetary haggling over Title X funding unfortunately misses the bigger picture: when it comes to the woeful underfunding of reproductive health services, our politicians are being penny-wise but pound-foolish.

For starters, an investment in family planning pays spectacular dividends. Family planning enables couples to pursue economic opportunities, facilitates women's access to education, and improves the health and well-being of each child.

Title X also has enormous growth potential. Funding has lagged behind inflation for years, and in real dollar terms, funding levels today are 57% lower than in 1980 (Fig. 1). To match funding to 1980 levels, the current annual budget would have to be \$590 million. The burgeoning cost of medical care and the increasing number of low-income, uninsured Americans have further strained the system. Current public funding from all sources, including Title X and Medicaid, provides for only about half of the services that low-income men and women in the United States need [1].

Title X's family planning program also outperforms the other investments in its sector. Family planning and reproductive health care are basic preventive services that can reduce the number of unintended pregnancies and prevent the spread of sexually transmitted diseases. In other areas of clinical practice, the idea of preventive medicine is well-

respected and well-established. Doctors and patients are familiar with the idea of screening for and preventing illness, whether that means smoking cessation, colonoscopy to detect early colon cancer, or vaccines against childhood diseases and influenza. Governmental agencies and private sector insurance companies alike spend large sums of money—and justly so—for these preventive services.

But the case for providing reproductive health care is even more compelling. Most well-accepted basic preventive services are known to be *cost-effective*—that is, the health benefits they provide are considered to be worth the cost. In contrast, reproductive health services are *cost-saving*, and yield an impressive return on investment: every dollar of family planning funding decreases Medicaid costs by at least \$3 [2].

Restoring full funding—to assure family planning and reproductive health services for all low-income, uninsured Americans who need them—is a sensible way to save money. Savings begin in the very first year. As your congressional representatives struggle to find budget solutions, remind them that unintended pregnancy is a continuing and costly public health problem in the United States. Reproductive health and family planning services reduce unintended pregnancy, prevent sexually transmitted diseases, and save money. At a time when every dollar counts, we must not miss the chance to make an investment with such immediate and important payoffs.

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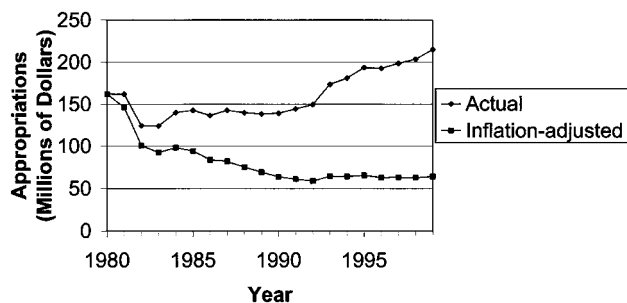


Fig. 1. Title X has not kept up with inflation.

References

- [1] The Alan Guttmacher Institute. Fulfilling the promise: public policy and U.S. family planning clinics. New York: Alan Guttmacher Institute, 2000.
- [2] Gold RB. Title X: three decades of accomplishment. Guttmacher Report on Public Policy. February 2001:5–8.