

Roller coaster ride for Family Planning Programs in North Dakota

By Robin Iszler, Central Valley Health District Administrator

For 45 years, North Dakotans have had access to reproductive health services through the Title X Family Planning program. Title X in North Dakota has a slightly different service delivery model compared to other States who use Planned Parenthood organizations to provide the services. Title X dollars in North Dakota are administered through the State Health Department and contracted to nine local communities thru Local Public Health or community agencies. This model has been widely successful at providing services to local communities in North Dakota. However, the new federal administration threatens to end the program and a loss of the program will dramatically impact the lives of North Dakota families.

“Funding for Family Planning has been under fire many times over the past 45 years” states Robin Iszler, RN and Administrator at Central Valley Health District. Robin has been working with the local Family Planning program since 1988. “With each new federal administration the political climate around Title X programs may change”. “Back in 1987, a “Gag Rule” prohibited family planning staff from providing information about abortion. In 1993, this rule was overturned. Abortion seems to be the major concern about the services provided at Title X Family Planning clinics. However, none of the Title X funding can be used for abortion services. This roller coaster ride is what North Dakota Family Planning staff have come to expect with Title X funding.”

During the 20th century, the health and life expectancy of those residing in the United States improved dramatically. Family Planning is considered one of the ten great public health achievements. This explains the passion those working with North Dakota Family Planning has for continuing the work.

With a mission of assisting women and men to understand and take responsibility for their reproductive health through education, counseling, and medical services, North Dakota Family Planning programs prevent unintended pregnancies and abortions by providing an entry point for families to access reproductive medical care. Throughout North Dakota access to health care services in rural areas can be challenging. North Dakota Family Planning clinics have branched out to 18 service site locations to provide services. The number of private clinics that offer services based on income and family size is limited to the four federally qualified health centers (FQHC) in North Dakota. Family Planning clinics fill the gap for those with limited incomes who do not live in areas where they have access to a FQHC. With the Title X federal dollars, family planning clinics in North Dakota are able to provide a significant cost savings to clients by applying discounts based on a client’s income.

Family Planning is making a difference in North Dakota. In 2016, our Title X clinics served over 7,500 clients. Of these 72% of the clients served were less than 250% of the Federal Poverty Level. Also, 37% had no health insurance, 54% had private health insurance, and 7% had public health insurance (Medicaid). Family Planning staff helps to improve pregnancy outcomes, behavior and decision making by providing education and medical services to clients.

In 1969, Richard Nixon stated “It is my view that no American woman should be denied access to family planning assistance because of her economic condition. I believe therefore, we should establish as a national goal the provision of adequate family planning services.”

For 45 years, providing adequate services to reduce abortions and improve the health of families has been the goal of Title X programs in North Dakota. Protecting Title X can only happen with support from all levels it is important to future generations.