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## Don't sideline women's reproductive health care

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Myths and misinformation are flying in the fight over health-care reform. And, although we each represent different political views and don't agree on many aspects of health-care reform, we do agree that one such disinformation campaign is particularly damaging to women.

One of the harshest and loudest promoters of this negative campaign is Rush Limbaugh, who recently said on his radio program, "Reproductive health care is abortion."

This kind of outrageous and polarizing language gets the listeners' attention, but undermines the health care of millions of women and the thousands of health centers that serve them.

Women's reproductive health is primary health care. It includes basic, essential services, such as annual gynecological exams, Pap smears to screen for cervical cancer, mammograms to screen for breast cancer, screening, vaccination and treatment for sexually transmitted diseases, prenatal care and birth control.

In fact, one in four women who receives contraceptive care does so at a women's health center. One in six women who obtains a Pap test or pelvic exam does so at a women's health center. One third of all women who receive counseling, testing or treatment for STDs, including HIV, gets that care at a women's health center.

For many women, especially low-income women, a community reproductive health-care clinic is their only contact with a doctor or a nurse.

And, quality reproductive health care is essential to women throughout life. For example, cervical cancer - once one of the most common causes of death for American women - is curable in the early stages. Due to the increased use of the Pap test, cervical cancer death rates declined by 74 percent between 1955 and 1992. And although most cases are found in women under 50, almost 20 percent of women with cervical cancer are diagnosed after age 65.

Any meaningful discussion of health-care reform must include accurate information about the basic, essential health-care needs of more than half of the U.S. population - women.

Providing safe and legal medical services for terminating a pregnancy is only one small part of a comprehensive health-care system. Defining the discussion of women's reproductive health as this issue alone is a great injustice to all women and to the professionals who serve them.

Thoughtful people who disagree on abortion need to join hands in support of the absolute necessity of the many other critical components of women's reproductive health care. The lives of our daughters and granddaughters depend upon it.