

the Advocate

Planned Parenthood League of Massachusetts

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PPLM's Education Programs Break Down Barriers

In today's precarious political climate - marked by escalating attacks on Planned Parenthood, and a misguided agenda to replace the federal Teen Pregnancy Prevention Program (TPPP) with ineffective abstinence-only programs - young people need honest and accurate information. PPLM continues to lead the way through efforts, here in Massachusetts and around the country, to break down harmful barriers to essential sex education, with a focus on reaching young people most affected by negative sexual health outcomes.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, lesbian, gay, and bisexual youth in the U.S are disproportionately affected by unintended pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections (STIs). PPLM is fighting these health disparities through its participation in IN·cluded, a groundbreaking program that stands at the forefront of the fight for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and questioning (LGBTQ) health equity and inclusion. Offered by PPLM's *Get Real* Teen Council (GRTC) peer educators, the program trains sexual health care providers to deliver LGBTQ-inclusive care, and educates youth about risk prevention, how to access health services, and how to advocate for their own sexual health needs in health care settings. In the coming months, 30 peer educators will reach 250 LGBTQ youth in Greater Boston and Central Massachusetts.



Get Real Teen Council members from Greater Boston and Central Massachusetts at their annual retreat.

Complementing its work with IN·cluded is PPLM's latest project to address adolescent sexual health disparities across the state, funded by a grant from the Massachusetts Department of Public Health. In schools, in out-of-school settings, and through teen parent programs, PPLM educators will provide its highly successful *Get Real: Comprehensive Sex Education That Works* high school curriculum to young people in Boston, Worcester, and Springfield. Through this initiative, PPLM aims to reduce persistent racial and ethnic inequities like teen birth and STI rates, promote healthy relationships, and improve high school graduation rates.

Everything PPLM learns in the community fuels the work of the

Planned Parenthood Advocacy Fund (PPAF), which has doubled down on its seven-year effort to pass the *Healthy Youth Act*. This bill would guarantee that any Massachusetts public school electing to teach sex education offers a curriculum that is medically accurate, age-appropriate, and comprehensive. Thanks in large part to PPAF's determination, the Massachusetts Senate overwhelmingly passed the *Healthy Youth Act* in July; the bill now awaits House action.

Taken together, these and other initiatives are breaking down barriers and expanding PPLM's commitment to advance the health and wellbeing of Massachusetts' families and young people.

ceo's corner

Natasha Moustache



Dear Friends,

We all know the Trump administration and extreme politicians want to build walls. PPLM wants to tear them down. That's what we're doing, every day, through bold advocacy, new health care advances, and innovative educational initiatives you'll read about in this issue of *The Advocate*.

I've never been prouder of Planned Parenthood

for the instrumental role our resilient organization played in defeating the dangerous "Trumpcare" bill in July. That same month, here in Massachusetts, the Planned Parenthood Advocacy Fund, PPLM's political arm, celebrated the passage of the *Pregnant Workers Fairness Act* after actively supporting it since January. The Advocacy Fund is continuing to build support for other key bills that would expand access to birth control, confidential health care, paid family leave, and health care services through telemedicine.

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While leading the way in grassroots advocacy, we're also breaking down systemic barriers to care through new technologies and programs. We've launched an easy-to-use, mobile-optimized website that allows visitors to find information on their phones, tablets, or desktops, and we've introduced popular online appointment scheduling. Beyond these technological investments, we've become a Certified Application Counselor site at our Greater Boston health center, enabling us to enroll our patients in health insurance plans and guide them through the application process.

Initiatives like these are helping us tear down walls and open doors for thousands of patients who rely on PPLM for care, no matter what. We couldn't do it without your support. Thank you, as always, for your commitment to PPLM!

Jennifer Childs-Roshak, MD, MBA
President and CEO

advocate spotlight: The Shannon Lowney Award

Each year, PPLM recognizes select staff members for their outstanding support of patients by presenting them with the Shannon Lowney Award for Compassionate Care. Shannon was a dedicated, 25-year-old staff member who died tragically in the 1994 shooting at PPLM's Greater Boston health center. Her former colleagues remember her as "the kind face and heart" who warmly welcomed patients to Planned Parenthood and made them feel respected and cared for. Shannon was passionate about her work and deeply committed to making sure that patients had access to the care they needed.

This year's Shannon Lowney Award recipients are PPLM Health Care Assistants (HCAs) Faith Woodside, Boston; Cara Callahan, Springfield; Molly Bailey, Worcester; and Erika Torres, HCA Trainer in

Springfield. HCAs are frontline staff members who do everything from greeting and checking in patients to verifying insurance and scheduling appointments. HCAs are also skilled professionals trained in basic medical terminology and prepared to explain medical processes.

Cara Callahan, who has worked in Springfield for four years, says "Receiving this award is a tremendous honor. Shannon embodied the type of care and compassion which we all strive to provide. Every year, I look at the letters of support compiled in PPLM's remembrance book from the time after the shooting and am reinvigorated to continue doing this work and treating every patient with the kindness and concern that Shannon was known for."

Social Science Research at PPLM



Dr. Elizabeth Janiak, PPLM's Director of Social Science Research and an Instructor at Harvard Medical School, uses her interdisciplinary social science and public health training to investigate factors that affect access to sexual and reproductive health

care. We talked to Dr. Janiak about her innovative work at PPLM and the program's priorities.

PPLM's Social Science research program is relatively new - it just entered its second year. What's the program's mission?

EJ: We're part of the PPLM Research Department, and our unique mandate is to generate knowledge that can improve access to abortion, birth control, and other health care services. This mission has become more critical over the past year as political efforts to restrict abortion and eliminate funding for and access to preventive care have rapidly accelerated. Our goals are to inform health care practitioners, activists, and public officials about our findings; educate the public about issues critical to their health; and ultimately help promote evidence-based policy making.

Tell us about some of your current research projects.

EJ: We're exploring ways Massachusetts' parental consent law affects the experience of our state's minors who are seeking safe and legal abortion services. For many reasons, parental consent isn't always an option. Some young women cannot discuss their pregnancies with their parents because they live in situations where there is strife or abuse, because they fear being forced to leave their homes, or because their parents are themselves experiencing a crisis such as hospitalization. In such cases, the minor patient must appear in court and seek permission from a judge. We're finding

that delays inherent in this process represent real barriers to access, potentially leading to more complex medical procedures. Consent-based delays also create psychological, social, and economic burdens. To reduce these burdens, the Planned Parenthood Advocacy Fund is supporting a legislative effort to lower the age of consent to 16; I recently testified before the Massachusetts legislature about how the current law creates hardships for minors, citing our research.

For another project, I'm partnering with Dr. Kari Braaten, a physician from PPLM's clinical research team, to look at the particular needs of patients who use opioids. Opioid addiction is a huge public health crisis in Massachusetts and nationwide. We're asking: How can we optimize care - by offering counseling, drug treatment referrals, birth control options - to better serve these patients?

"Our goals are to inform health care practitioners, activists, and public officials about our findings; educate the public about issues critical to their health; and ultimately help promote evidence-based policy making."

What lies ahead for PPLM's social science research program?

EJ: Thanks to peer-reviewed research grants from scientific funders like the Society of Family Planning, and the support of generous individual donors, our program is flexible and positioned to respond to the emerging needs of our patients and our communities. All our research is designed to protect vital access to high-quality reproductive health care, whatever challenges arise.

faces & places



1 Images (from top): **1.** Ilene Greenberg, longtime PPLM volunteer, with her family; four generations of PPLM supporters, at a PPLM gathering on Nantucket in July; **2.** GRTC members at the Boston Pride Parade; **3.** *Run 4 All Women MA* organizers who ran 50 miles and raised over \$9,000 for PPLM this summer. (Image Credits: Image 2, Nina Gallant; Image 3, Charlotte Walsh)



Upcoming Events

October 23rd
President's Society
Conference

November 28th
North Shore House Party

November 30th Cambridge
House Party

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