

From: [corinne Van Houten Anselme](mailto:corinne.Van.Houten@anselme.com)
To: [E-OHPSCA2713.EBSA](mailto:E-OHPSCA2713@EBSA.com)
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I join with the American Association of University Women (AAUW) in asking you to accept the recommendations of the Institute of Medicine as pertain to coverage of preventive care under the new health care law, and to reject any exemptions for "religious employers." These preventive services are a critical element of the new law and would provide countless women better access to necessary health care.

While AAUW believes that "religious refusal" exemptions unjustly deny women access to contraceptive services, others, driven by an ideological distaste for all contraceptive services, are pushing the government to make exemptions even larger. Indeed, some groups are pushing for the exemption to apply to religiously-run health providers, so hospitals with religious affiliations would be exempt from the coverage requirement, even though they employ people of all faiths and ideologies. If granted, this larger exemption would deny access to thousands of women just because of where they work.

I am truly stunned to think that there could be any consideration of "religious refusal exemptions" regarding women's healthcare and women's choices. No one should be able to alter doctor's prescriptions in accordance with some personal belief system that has NO connection with the health of the woman or the diagnosis made by her doctor. There is absolutely NO justification for persons of any religious orientation to determine the personal health choices of doctors and their patients.

I urge you to ensure women have access to quality preventive care by accepting IOM's recommendations and rejecting the proposed religious refusal exemption provisions.

Corinne Van Houten <http://www.corinnevanhouten.com>