

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND ACCOUNTABILITY

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July 11, 2024

The Honorable Gene Dodaro
Comptroller General of the United States
U.S. Government Accountability Office
441 G Street, NW
Washington, DC 20548

Dear Comptroller General Dodaro:

We are concerned about certain federally funded organizations that claim to provide reproductive health care for pregnant people but whose ultimate motive, often achieved through deception, misinformation, and intimidation, is to prevent people from accessing abortion care.¹ These organizations, known as Crisis Pregnancy Centers (CPCs) or anti-abortion centers, are often unregulated and lack government oversight. Even though evidence overwhelmingly shows that CPCs are a barrier to health care, studies, including a recent report, found that CPCs continue to receive millions of dollars in federal funding, much of which is difficult for the public to track.² We request the Government Accountability Office (GAO) conduct a study on the federal funding that CPCs receive.

Specifically, CPCs undermine public health in a number of ways.³ Often posing as legitimate medical clinics, CPCs provide biased, limited, and scientifically inaccurate information about the type and safety of care options available to those who are pregnant.⁴ Not only do these deceptive practices make CPCs hard to identify and regulate, they also have been found to delay access to medically legitimate prenatal and abortion care, increasing the risk that

¹ The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, *Crisis Pregnancy Centers* (Oct. 2022) (online at www.acog.org/-/media/project/acog/acogorg/files/advocacy/issue-briefs/crisis-pregnancy-centers.pdf).

² Cartwright, Alice F, and Ushma D Upadhyay, *Pregnancy Outcomes After Exposure to Crisis Pregnancy Centers Among an Abortion-Seeking Sample Recruited Online*, National Library of Medicine, Public Library of Science, (July 28, 2021) (online at www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8318304/); *Memo: Assessment of Susan B. Anthony's 'Charlotte Lozier Institute' Latest 'CPC Value' Estimates*, Reproductive Health and Freedom Watch (Feb. 16, 2024) (online at <https://reproductivehealthfreedom.us/memo-assessment-of-susan-b-anthonys-charlotte-lozier-institute-latest-cpc-value-estimates/>); Julie Rabinovitz, MPH, Diana Rodin, MPH, Hannah Savage, MPH, Rebecca Kellenberg, MPP, *An Analysis of Federal Funding for Crisis Pregnancy Centers 2017-2023*, Health Management Associates (June 17, 2024).

³ Montoya, Melissa N., et al., *The Problems with Crisis Pregnancy Centers: Reviewing the Literature and Identifying New Directions for Future Research*, International Journal of Women's Health, U.S. National Library of Medicine, (June 8, 2022) (online at www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC9189146/).

⁴ *Id.*

those who are pregnant will experience health complications or be denied the care they seek altogether.⁵ CPCs specifically target young people, people of color, and low-income people who are already experiencing disparities in health and pregnancy outcomes.⁶ Further, CPCs often do not adhere to HIPAA, and many experts have raised concerns that CPCs might be exploiting patients' personal data to further harass and intimidate those seeking abortions.⁷ For these reasons, medical organizations including the American Medical Association (AMA), the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG), the Society for Adolescent Health and Medicine (SAHM), and the North American Society for Pediatric and Adolescent Gynecology (NASPAG) have expressed concern that CPCs do not adhere to medical and ethical practice standards.⁸

Of particular concern are CPCs operated by, members of, or affiliated with Heartbeat International, Care Net, and the National Institute of Family and Life Advocates (NIFLA)—organizations that support most of the CPCs in the United States.⁹ The individual centers tied to these groups are not subject to the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) standards and have been reported to collect and use patients' data with little transparency.¹⁰ Further, all three of these umbrella organizations have pushed or currently push medical misinformation debunked by scientific consensus.¹¹ Patients at facilities affiliated with these organizations have also reported feeling blamed, judged and shamed.¹²

⁵ Cartwright, Alice F, and Ushma D Upadhyay, *Pregnancy Outcomes After Exposure to Crisis Pregnancy Centers Among an Abortion-Seeking Sample Recruited Online*, National Library of Medicine, Public Library of Science, (July 28, 2021) (online at www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8318304/).

⁶ Montoya, Melissa N., et al., *The Problems with Crisis Pregnancy Centers: Reviewing the Literature and Identifying New Directions for Future Research*, International Journal of Women's Health, U.S. National Library of Medicine, (June 8, 2022) (online at www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC9189146/).

⁷ *Anti-Abortion Pregnancy Centers Collect Personal Data*, TIME, (June 22, 2022) (online at time.com/6189528/anti-abortion-pregnancy-centers-collect-data-investigation).

⁸ Amy G. Bryant and Jonas J. Schwartz, *Why Crisis Pregnancy Centers are Legal but Unethical*, AMA Journal of Ethics (Mar. 2018) (online at <https://journalofethics.ama-assn.org/article/why-crisis-pregnancy-centers-are-legal-unethical/2018-03>); *Pregnancy and Childbirth: Truth and Transparency in Pregnancy Counseling Centers H-420.954*, American Medical Association (2022) (online at <https://policysearch.ama->).

⁹ Chen, Alice X., *Crisis Pregnancy Centers: Impeding the Right to Informed Decision Making*, Hein Online, Cardozo Journal of Law, (Mar. 8, 2021) (online at heinonline.org/HOL/LandingPage?handle=hein.journals%2Fcardw19&div=37&id=&page=).

¹⁰ *Anti-Abortion Centers Handle Private Health Information—but Aren't Bound by HIPPA*, Equity Forward, (June 14, 2024) (online at equityfwd.org/sites/default/files/anti-abortion_centers_handle_private_health_information-but_arent_bound_by_hipaa_11.22.21.pdf).

¹¹ *Pregnant? Need Help? They Have an Agenda.*, New York Times (May 12, 2022) (online at www.nytimes.com/interactive/2022/05/12/opinion/crisis-pregnancy-centers-roe.html).

¹² *Id.*

Concerningly, research indicates that since CPCs began to receive federal funding in 1996, they often receive millions in federal funding each year.¹³ Recently, a study aiming to clarify the federal and state funding that went to CPCs found that more than 650 CPCs in 49 states and Washington, D.C., received federal funding totaling \$400,000,000 between 2017 and 2023.¹⁴ These CPCs received funding from a variety of federal accounts, including from the *Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act*, which distributed over \$280 million to CPCs, as well as from programs including Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Teen Pregnancy Prevention (TPP), Title X Federal Family Planning (Title X), Title V General Department (GD) Sexual Risk Avoidance Education (SRAE) and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Emergency Food and Shelter Program.¹⁵ Moreover, the study found there is limited oversight and transparency in how federal funds going to CPCs were allocated and used—especially with regard to block grants—which in some instances might have led to some CPCs receiving multiple awards under different names.¹⁶

Although non-governmental researchers and advocacy groups have been able to estimate total federal funding for CPCs and identify some of the federal accounts from which CPCs receive money, gaps in our understanding of how CPCs are supported by the federal government remain. Given the concerns from medical professionals and reproductive health experts that CPCs are not bound by medical and ethical practice standards and often do not provide medically accurate information or health care, and the resources they do provide are tied to undermining maternal health and access to abortion, we have serious concerns that CPCs continue to receive millions in federal aid with little transparency and accountability to the public.¹⁷ Given these concerns, we request that the GAO conduct a study that examines the following questions:

1. Since 1996, how much total federal funding have CPCs received each fiscal year?
 - a. How has the total amount of funding changed from year to year since 1996?
 - b. Since 1996, how much federal funding have these organizations in particular received in total and each year:

¹³ National Abortion Federation, *Crisis Pregnancy Centers: An Affront to Choice* (June 14, 2006) (online at www.prochoice.org/pubs_research/publications/downloads/public_policy/cpc_report.pdf).

¹⁴ Julie Rabinovitz, MPH, Diana Rodin, MPH, Hannah Savage, MPH, Rebecca Kellenberg, MPP. An Analysis of Federal Funding for Crisis Pregnancy Centers 2017-2023. Health Management Associates. (June 17, 2024) (online at www.healthmanagement.com/insights/briefs-reports/hma-paper-examines-federal-funding-streams-supporting-crisis-pregnancy-centers/).

¹⁵ *Id.*

¹⁶ *Id.*

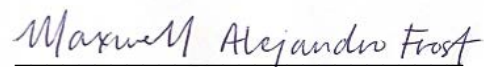
¹⁷ Journal of Adolescent Health, *Crisis Pregnancy Centers in the U.S.: Lack of Adherence to Medical and Ethical Practice Standards* (Apr. 11, 2024) (online at [www.jahonline.org/article/S1054-139X\(19\)30413-6/fulltext](http://www.jahonline.org/article/S1054-139X(19)30413-6/fulltext)); Kissling, Alexandra, et al. *Free, but at What Cost? How US Crisis Pregnancy Centers Provide Services, Culture, Health, and Sexuality* (Mar. 16, 2022) (online at www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13691058.2022.2116489).

- i. Heartbeat International
 - ii. Care Net
 - iii. The National Institute of Family and Life Advocates (NIFLA)
 - iv. Each of the above listed affiliates and members.
2. Since 1996, from which federal accounts and programs have CPCs received federal funding each fiscal year?
 - a. What amount of funding have they received from each account or program each fiscal year and in what states, territories, and tribal communities are they receiving this federal funding?
 - b. What types of justifications do umbrella organizations and/or individual centers provide to qualify for the accounts or programs from which they have received federal funding?
 - c. Does each organization and/or each center track what they use federal funding for? How are these audited?
 - i. What programs or services at each individual center is federal funding received and used for?
 - ii. Are these programs or services that use federal funding evidence-based programs?
 - iii. What standards are used to assess the efficacy of these programs?
 - iv. Are there any instances in which a CPC has received multiple awards from the same program?
 - d. How have the types of accounts from which CPCs have received federal funding and the amount of funding they have received from those accounts changed over time?

Thank you for your assistance in investigating this important issue. We look forward to reviewing GAO's findings on this important topic. If you have any questions regarding this request, please contact the Committee on Oversight and Accountability staff at (202) 225-5051.

Sincerely,


Jamie Raskin
Ranking Member


Maxwell Frost
Member of Congress

cc: The Honorable James Comer, Chairman