

American Medical Women's Association  
Position Paper on Principals of Abortion

The American Medical Women's Association, an organization of women physicians and medical students, values equality for women and equal opportunity for women to achieve their full professional and personal potential. AMWA also has a strong mission to support policies and programs that improve women's health. The Association has high respect for each member and her right to hold whatever moral, religious, and philosophical beliefs her conscience dictates, and to practice her profession and order her personal life accordingly.

**In light of all those considerations, the American Medical Women's Association has adopted the position that the decision to continue or interrupt a pregnancy belongs to the pregnant woman, in consultation with her physician.**

Pregnancy is a major medical event in the life of a woman, a condition that involves medical risk for a patient, ranging from minor physical inconveniences to death itself. In the United States, 49% of the 6.3 million pregnancies a year are unintended. A pregnancy that is unintended or unwanted carries a greater medical risk for the woman because neglected prenatal care results in higher rates of pregnancy-related disease and death. A pregnant woman's decision to complete or terminate a pregnancy is a medical issue to be made in the privacy of the doctor-patient relationship. Every pregnancy taken to term requires high standards of prenatal care to assure the best possible outcome. Every pregnancy interrupted by abortion requires a procedure carried out by the appropriate technique under safe, antiseptic conditions, which will protect the health and future fertility of the patient.

Abortions will be chosen whether they are legal or illegal. When abortion was illegal in this country, it was brought about by dangerous, self-induced methods or by clandestine, often untrained, practitioners under unsterile conditions with no follow-up care. Many women suffered reproductive tract damage, infection, bleeding, permanent sterility, or death. Since the advent of legal abortion in the United States, there has been a marked decrease in all pregnancy-related deaths and an even greater drop in pregnancy and abortion-related complications. Today, abortion is the most frequently performed surgical procedure in the United States.

The 1973 Supreme Court decision *Roe v. Wade* struck a fair balance between the responsibility of the state to protect a woman's right to make personal medical decisions and the responsibility of the state to protect the potentially viable third trimester fetus.

The American Medical Women's Association will oppose efforts to overturn or weaken *Roe v. Wade*. We will oppose laws and court rulings that interfere with the doctor-patient relationship, either in requiring or proscribing specific medical

advice to pregnant women. We will oppose measures that limit access to medical care for pregnant women, particularly for poor or underserved groups.

We support the development of new, safe, more effective methods of contraception and abortion. We believe that contraceptive prescriptions and information should be available to anyone requesting them. We support integrating comprehensive training in abortion practice into medical education. We strongly support programs that will improve the public knowledge and responsibility about sexual matters so that unintended pregnancy will become less frequent.