



# More Than A Choice

*A Progressive Vision  
for Reproductive Health & Rights*

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## More Than A Choice

### *A Progressive Vision for Reproductive Health and Rights*

Progressives who are committed to reproductive health rights currently face hostile opposition from social conservatives and self-doubt among allies. Americans, in their discomfort with abortion, have disengaged from a narrow and entrenched debate that is seemingly unconnected to other reproductive rights issues. To overcome these challenges, we must articulate a vision for reproductive freedom that is integrated into a larger progressive agenda.

In *More than a Choice: A Progressive Vision for Reproductive Health and Rights*, the Center for American Progress proposes a re-visioning of reproductive rights that broadens the current discourse beyond the stagnant abortion debate. Progressives can expand the definition of reproductive rights by embracing equally the rights to have or not have children—with a partner of one’s choosing and in a time and manner that honors one’s conscience and life circumstances—and by placing abortion within its appropriate context as one of a wide range of important reproductive rights issues.

The reasons for doing so are indicated in the title of the paper itself. First, the reproductive choices that people face in their daily lives involve more than abortion. Second, some women do not experience their reproductive decisions as “choices” because of current or past restraints that have kept those choices from being meaningful. Third, the policies essential to achieving reproductive health and rights are critical to a larger progressive agenda; they are not a side piece that progressives can choose to endorse or excise when it seems expedient to do so.

Our agenda begins with a commitment to four basic cornerstones:

The ability to become a parent and to parent with dignity; The ability to determine whether or when to have children; The ability to have a healthy pregnancy; and The ability to have healthy and safe families and relationships.
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These categories are interrelated and somewhat fluid. Women need to live and work in communities that are free from violence and environmental toxins to have healthy pregnancies and raise strong families. People need economic stability, educational opportunities, and family-friendly employment policies to be good parents and good employees. Individuals and couples need safe and affordable contraception and abortion care to raise the children they already have, plan for future children, or prevent childbearing. And both women and men need accurate medical information and affordable health care to achieve all of these overall objectives.

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Our agenda also sets forth principles that provide a framework for reproductive health and rights and connect them to overarching progressive values:

- Recognition of the right of all people to make reproductive and sexual decisions in a neutrally supportive environment
- Support for the moral agency of women
- Respect for pregnancy and mothering by all women, regardless of race, ethnicity, age, ability, sexuality, or income
- A belief that all children deserve to be wanted, loved, and nurtured
- Reliance on scientific and evidence-based research to inform public policy decisions
- Dedication to gender equity in all areas, including government, education, employment, athletics, sexual relationships, and the family
- Freedom of gender expression

Finally, we offer a progressive view of the government's role in ensuring genuine reproductive freedom. The government should provide a just, safe, and diverse society that balances individual liberties with the common good; guarantee the conditions necessary for exercising reproductive freedom; and defend the individual autonomy and moral agency required to make complex personal decisions about sexuality, reproduction, and family. It is not sufficient for the government simply to acknowledge particular rights and then refrain from interfering with them. The progressive view demands that the government remove regulatory obstacles, protect people from interference by private individuals and institutions, and provide concrete supports.

Progressives have a unique opportunity to redefine the very terms of the debate over reproductive and sexual rights by re-establishing the context in which decisions about pregnancy are made, connecting support for reproductive rights with broader progressive values, working in alliance with other progressive movements, and promoting the role of government in respecting and protecting our rights. Questions about reproduction and sexuality affect every human being. No progressive agenda would be complete without these issues.

To read the full report, please visit [americanprogress.org/issues/2006/09/more\\_than\\_a\\_choice.html](http://americanprogress.org/issues/2006/09/more_than_a_choice.html).