Planned Parenthood Center of Tucson (1950-1977) [1]

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Established in 1950, the Planned Parenthood Center of Tucson provided Arizona women with family planning resources until 1977, when it expanded to locations outside of Tucson and became Planned Parenthood of Southern Arizona. The Planned Parenthood Center of Tucson was formed when the Clinica Para Madres, the first birth control clinic in Arizona, merged with the national organization Planned Parenthood Federation of America. The clinic moved to several rented locations throughout the Tucson area before establishing a permanent location named the Margaret Sanger Clinic in Tucson, Arizona.

The Planned Parenthood Center of Tucson began as the Clinica Para Madres, the first birth control clinic in Arizona established by birth control activist Margaret Sanger and a group of prominent Tucson women. In the 1930s, following several years of birth control activism in New York, Sanger moved to Arizona in an attempt to better her son’s respiratory health. Once there, Sanger argued that contraception and family planning could help reduce Arizona’s high rate of infant mortality. Sanger and other birth control activists used the term family planning to describe the practice of women planning when to have children, spacing apart their pregnancies. Sanger viewed the spacing of children, through contraception, as beneficial to women because it allowed them to have children when they were physically, emotionally, and financially prepared.

Sanger and a group of women with social, political, and financial prominence in Tucson opened Clinica Para Madres in December 1934. In 1934 contraceptives were illegal across the US due to the Comstock Act. The Comstock Act made distribution of contraceptives or information about contraceptives illegal on the grounds that contraception was obscene and should not be discussed. The US Court of Appeals in the Second Circuit in New York, New York, decided in the 1936 case United States v. One Package of Japanese Pessaries to overturn the Comstock Act and made birth control legal. Though the stigma surrounding birth control and sex still remained, the clinic was then able to operate legally.

In 1950 the Clinica Para Madres became affiliated with the national organization Planned Parenthood Federation of America (PPFA). PPFA formed in 1942 in New York City, New York, when the Bell Control Research Bureau merged with the American Birth Control League. Those two organizations worked to increase women’s access to contraception, to study the effectiveness of contraceptive methods, and to advocate for contraception. Following the affiliation of Clinica Para Madres with PPFA, the organization’s name changed to Planned Parenthood Center of Tucson.

By the 1950s, the Planned Parenthood Center of Tucson had expanded its clinical services. The clinic helped families space the birth of their children, and it provided contraceptives, counseling for marriage including sex education for newlyweds, and counseling and referrals for infertility.

In addition to expanded clinical services, Planned Parenthood Center of Tucson began expanding their clinic locations. In the 1950s, Planned Parenthood of Tucson expanded their services throughout Nogales, a border town between Arizona and Mexico. Planned Parenthood volunteers and staff made monthly trips to Nogales. In addition to work in Nogales, Planned Parenthood expanded their services across rural Arizona, with regular trips to Marana, Sahuarita, and Eloy, all in Arizona. The people who received services were primarily migrant cotton farmers. In Marana, Planned Parenthood helped run a clinic once a month in a Community Christian Church. The clinic was staffed by Pima County physicians and assisted by Planned Parenthood staff and volunteers. Services included infertility counseling, information about planning pregnancies, and sexual education for marriage.

In 1958 the buildings blocking the view of the original clinic from the cathedral were torn down to make room for a parking lot, and the clinic moved locations for the first time since opening in 1934. The clinic moved into two rented rooms on Jackson Street in Tucson in 1958. In 1964, the Tucson clinic moved to a larger space on Fifth Avenue in Tucson.

In August 1965, the Tucson Planned Parenthood Auxiliary formed. The Auxiliary consisted of volunteers who filled various Planned Parenthood clinic needs including: working at the center, speaking at civil engagements, training new volunteers, and fundraising. The auxiliary fundraising campaigns sustained the clinic. These fundraising events included coffee and tea events, dinners and conferences, and auctions.

In the late 1960s, the Rachael Brewster Foundation funded the Tucson Planned Parenthood with a large grant. That grant money, along with fundraising from Sanger, who died in 1966, and from the original clinic founders, enabled the clinic to build its own facility. In 1971, the building was completed and named the Margaret Sanger Clinic.

The new larger space enabled the clinic to serve more patients, and throughout the 1960s and 70s, the clinic’s patient load increased to greater than 1,200 new patients.

By the early 1970s the organization added a number of new clinic services. Five doctors worked at the Margaret Sanger Clinic and another doctor served the Nogales area. New services included Pap Smears, which test for cervical cancer, venereal disease testing, birth control pills, IUDs, pregnancy testing, unwanted pregnancy counseling, breast exams, vasectomies, and education outreach activities. Patients paid on a sliding scale according to their incomes. The average patient visiting the clinic was between 20 and 24 years-old with no children and with no more than a high school education. Unwanted pregnancy counseling was offered with adoption and abortions discussed as options. If women chose to terminate their pregnancies, Planned Parenthood Center of Tucson referred them to qualified physicians. Additionally, by 1970 Planned Parenthood Center of Tucson began treating teenagers with or without parental consent. However, before teenagers could receive contraception, the clinic required them to complete a sex education course.

In 1972, office space was added to the Margaret Sanger Clinic building to house the education department of Planned Parenthood Center of Tucson. Three years later, in 1975, the organization raised over 370,000 dollars to renovate and expand the clinic.

In 1977 the Planned Parenthood Center of Tucson expanded and absorbed clinics in Cochise County in the towns of Douglas, Arizona, and in Sierra Vista, Arizona. The addition of those two clinics caused the organization to change its name to the Planned Parenthood of Southern Arizona. Into the twenty-first century, Planned Parenthood of Southern Arizona provided residents of Arizona with family planning and reproductive healthcare.

Sources

   Sub-Group Two, “Executive,” Box 4, (n.d.).
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- Contraception
- Planned Parenthood Federation of America
- Infertility
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- Obstetrics
- Gynecology
- Spermicides
- Birth control clinics
- Diaphragms, Vaginal
- Family Planning Services
- Spermatocidal Agents

Topic
- Organizations
- Reproduction
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