The Planned Parenthood Committee of Phoenix was established in 1942 to expand Arizona women's access to family planning resources. The Planned Parenthood Committee of Phoenix was formed through the merging of The Mother's Health Clinic in Phoenix, Arizona, with the national Planned Parenthood Federation of America. The clinic was primarily based within the Phoenix Memorial Hospital campus but expanded to other locations in the late 1960s. Until it became Planned Parenthood of Central and Northern Arizona in 1978, the Planned Parenthood Committee of Phoenix provided Arizona women with contraception, initially in the form of diaphragms and spermicide, and later including the birth control pill. It also provided educational information on relationships, sex, contraception, and infertility.

The Planned Parenthood Committee of Phoenix began as The Mother's Health Clinic, the first birth control clinic in Phoenix, and the second birth control clinic in Arizona. In October 1937 a group of wealthy, philanthropic women established The Mother's Health Clinic under the guidance of activist Margaret Sanger. According to historian Mary Melcher, clinic founders Peggy Goldwater, Lucy Culhbert, Edith Kinsolving, and Maie Heard were the clinics most devoted volunteers.

Sanger and the clinic founders established the clinic partly in response to the high rates of infant mortality in Arizona throughout the early twentieth century. When Sanger moved to Arizona in the 1930s, Arizona had the second highest infant mortality rate in the country. According to Melcher, that high rate resulted from Arizona's lack of qualified medical professionals, harsh climate, poverty, lack of sanitation, and a lack of infrastructure and transportation to connect the rural regions with more urban areas. In addition, the Catholic Church and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints both heavily influenced Arizona's population. Both Churches' doctrines emphasized having large families and said that women's primary duties were to be mothers. Those influences contributed to Arizona having higher birth rates than most states in the US, but it also higher rates of infant mortality due to complications following birth. During meetings with Arizona women, Sanger discussed how contraception and family planning were essential to reduce maternal and infant mortality. Sanger and many other birth control activists used the term family planning to describe the practice of a woman spacing her pregnancies and the birth of her children over time. The practice differed from a common situation in which women had children in rapid succession.

The Mother's Health Clinic opened in a house in Phoenix with one exam room. Volunteer physician Clyde Barker fitted married women with contraceptive diaphragms, a device of birth control that is inserted into the vagina and prevents sperm from accessing the cervix. The clinic legally served only married women. Although birth control became federally legal after the US Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit in New York City, New York, case United States v. One Package of Japanese Pessaries (1936), it was only legal for married women. Additionally, while birth control was legal federally, many states still banned or restricted the use of contraceptives. The clinic provided women with free or reduced cost diaphragms on a sliding scale depending on the women's income. The primary clientele for the clinic throughout the mid-twentieth century were adult women who were married, already had children, and wanted to limit or space further pregnancies.

The Mother's Health Clinic opened during a time of economic depression and world war. Despite serving many women, the clinic struggled to stay open as it was funded from private donations from local philanthropists. In 1942 the Mother's Health Clinic merged with the newly formed national organization, the Planned Parenthood Federation of America (PPFA). That merger provided the clinic with a nationally recognized name and more financial support.

The Planned Parenthood Federation of America formed through several mergers and name changes of other birth control organizations throughout the US. In 1939 two organizations headquartered in New York City, New York, merged to form Birth Control Federation of America. The first was the Birth Control Clinical Research Bureau, which collected statistics about the safety and effectiveness of birth control methods, and the second was the American Birth Control League, which advocated for birth control to solve global population growth and poverty. The Birth Control Federation of America changed its name to the Planned Parenthood Federation of America (PPFA) in 1942 to represent the more comprehensive goals of the organization.

The PPFA promoted family planning, arguing that if people had more access of contraception, stronger families would result. The PPFA argued that if women spacing their pregnancies and births, their family would be stronger because they could be financially and emotionally stable. The PPFA sought to give women more opportunities and choices in their reproduction by enabling them to control their fertility. After the Mother's Health Clinic's affiliation with PPFA in 1942, it changed its name to the Planned Parenthood Committee of Phoenix.

In 1947, Edith Kinsolving, a Mother's Health Clinic founder, chair, and wife of Episcopal Bishop Arthur Kinsolving, helped distribute contraception with Planned Parenthood Committee of Phoenix in the Episcopal Mission Parish House in Phoenix. Staff was available on Tuesday mornings and provided contraception and resources about sterility and infertility. Kinsolving's husband, a retired reverend, served as honorary president of the Phoenix Planned Parenthood board of directors. By the 1940s, the birth control clinics in Phoenix had gained support from most Episcopalian, Unitarian Universalists, Jewish, and Protestant church leaders. In addition, medical professionals began to publically support contraception and the birth control movement by the late 1940s. In 1948, the Arizona State Medical Association and the Maricopa and Pinal County Medical Associations endorsed the birth control clinics. According to Melcher, the endorsement by the medical community helped strengthen the social acceptance for the birth control movement and for organizations such as Planned Parenthood.

Throughout the early to mid-twentieth century, Planned Parenthood Committee of Phoenix faced criticism from many who said that sex was an obscene subject that should not be discussed and should remain within marriage. Those claims continued throughout the twentieth century. While Planned Parenthood Committee of Phoenix had support from many religious groups by the 1940s, Melcher noted that the organization faced outspoken hostility from the Catholic Church and from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. At a national Catholic family life conference in 1953, leaders in the Catholic Church spoke against the concept of Planned Parenthood as immoral and against the purpose of marriage.

In February of 1949, the Planned Parenthood Committee of Phoenix began a fundraising campaign to raise money to open a second clinic. Following several months of fundraising, a second clinic opened on Washington Street in Phoenix. In 1950 Planned Parenthood of Phoenix hired its first paid staff, physician Martha Leowandowski and nurse Bertha Van Winkle. By 1953 the clinic began using student nurses from Arizona State College in Tempe, Arizona, and from Phoenix College in Phoenix, as well as resident physicians. In 1953 the original Mother's Health Clinic and the second clinic closed and a new, larger clinic opened on Pierce Street in Phoenix.

In 1953 Phoenix Memorial Hospital superintendent, Emmett McLoughlin, a former Catholic Priest, donated space from on his hospital's Buckeye Road campus to the Planned Parenthood Phoenix Clinic. The organization accepted the offer and moved into the space, giving it greater financial stability. That move helped move the clinic into mainstream healthcare. Prior to the mid-1900s contraceptive healthcare was not largely accepted by the medical community and was little regarded as a form of healthcare. With the move of the Planned Parenthood clinic into a hospital, contraception became more associated with healthcare in Phoenix. The clinic operated on Tuesdays and Thursdays.

In addition to new clinic space on the hospital campus, the Planned Parenthood Committee of Phoenix helped open a mobile clinic in El Mirage, Arizona, in conjunction with the Mobile Health Clinic of the Migrant Ministry, in 1953. The mobile clinic in El Mirage expanded services to women living in cotton farming camps. The camps formed in the 1930s due to a boom in migrant workers who worked in central Arizona's cotton fields. The women in those camps suffered from drought, poverty, and unsanitary labor conditions. Those conditions led to high rates of infant and maternal mortality and their distance from towns made inaccessible. The mobile health clinics attempted to address those issues.

Throughout the 1950s, the Planned Parenthood Committee Phoenix's required more staff due to expansion and increasing number of clients. In March of 1959, Planned Parenthood of Phoenix hired its first paid executive director, Gladys MacLean. Prior to working with the Planned Parenthood Committee of Phoenix, MacLean had directed the Planned Parenthood in Syracuse, New York, for more than ten years.

Despite the Planned Parenthood Committee of Phoenix's growth throughout the mid-twentieth century, the organization was still unable to distribute educational materials to the public or to advertise the clinic due to an Arizona territorial law that prohibited the dissemination of information regarding sex or contraception, which was deemed obscene. That 1901 statute hindered the organization's ability to educate the public on contraception and the benefits of family planning. In 1959 Tom Sullivan, an attorney for Maricopa County, which encircles Phoenix, threatened to issue a complaint against the Planned Parenthood Committee of Phoenix for distributing information about contraception and for the services the organization offered at the hospital campus and health department. Sullivan argued that the committee's actions were illegal under the 1901 law.

In response, Planned Parenthood Committee of Phoenix filed a lawsuit against Maricopa County, aiming to overturn the territorial law. In 1961, an Arizona Superior Court in Phoenix upheld
Sources


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Subject
- Sanger, Margaret, 1879-1966
- Contraception
- Diaphragms, Vaginal
- Birth control clinics
- Gynecology
- Spermicides
- Goldwater, Margaret, 1909-1985
- Birth Control Clinical Research Bureau (New York, N.Y.)
- Abortion
- Planned Parenthood of Central and Northern Arizona
- Women’s rights
- Arizona
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- Reproductive rights
- Phoenix, Arizona
- Arizona—History
- Planned Parenthood Federation of America
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