Planned Parenthood Committee of Phoenix (1942-1978) [1]

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The Planned Parenthood Committee of Phoenix was established in 1942 to expand Arizona women's access to family planning [7] 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 [3], initially in the form of diaphragms and spermicide [4], and later including the birth control [5] pill. It also provided educational information on relationships, sex, contraception [3], and infertility [8].


Sanger and the clinic founders established the clinic partly in response to high rates of infant mortality in Arizona throughout the early to mid-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 [3] and family planning [2] were essential to reduce maternal and infant mortality. Sanger and many other birth control [5] 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 [5] that is inserted into the vagina [7] and prevents sperm [8] from accessing the cervix [9]. The clinic legally served only married women. Although birth control [5] 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 [5] 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 woman'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 [10], 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 [11] formed through several mergers and name changes of other birth control [5] 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 [5] methods, and the second was the American Birth Control League, which advocated for birth control [5] to solve global population growth and poverty. The Birth Control Federation of America changed its name to Planned Parenthood Federation of America (PPFA) in 1942 to represent the more comprehensive goals of the organization [10].

The PPFA promoted family planning [2], arguing that if people had more access of contraception [3], 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 affiliated 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 [3] with Planned Parenthood Committee of Phoenix in the Episcopal Mission Parish House in Phoenix. Staff was available on Tuesday mornings and provided contraception [3] and resources about sterility and infertility [11]. Kinsolving's husband, a retired reverend, served as honorary president of the Phoenix Planned Parenthood board of directors. By the 1940s, the birth control [5] clinics in Phoenix had gained support from most Episcopalian, Unitarian Universalists, Jewish, and Protestant church leaders. In addition, medical professionals began to publicly support contraception [3] and the birth control movement [12] by the late 1940s. In 1948, the Arizona State Medical Association and the Maricopa and Pinal County Medical Associations endorsed the birth control [5] clinics. According to Melcher, the endorsement by the medical community helped strengthen the social acceptance for the birth control [5] 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 [10] 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 McLaughlin, a former Catholic Priest, donated space from his hospital's Buckeye Road campus to the Planned Parenthood Phoenix Clinic. The organization [10] 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 [3] became more associated with healthcare in Phoenix. The clinic opened 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 birth control [5] 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 birth control [5] 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 [10] 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 [3], which was deemed obscene. That 1901 statute hindered the organization [10] ability to educate the public on contraception [3] and the benefits of family planning [2]. 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 [3] and for the services the organization [10] offered at the county hospital 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
the territorial law, so it remained illegal to distribute information about birth control [3]. Planned Parenthood appealed the ruling to the Arizona Supreme Court in Phoenix. In October 1962, the Arizona Supreme Court ruled that the law did not apply to family planning providers because their material was not meant to be obscene, but rather educational. That ruling allowed Planned Parenthood Committee of Phoenix to expand their educational services and to connect to the population at large through the distribution of newspapers, flyers, and hosted seminars, talks, and films.

After the case and throughout the 1960s, the Planned Parenthood Committee of Phoenix offered several new services for patients. In 1960, researchers developed the birth control [5] pill Enovid [13], which suppressed ovulation [14] by using synthetic progesterone [15], a sex hormone [14] involved in female menstruation [17] and pregnancy [18]. The birth control [5] pill became available in Arizona in 1961 and Planned Parenthood Committee of Phoenix began to offer it as part of its contraceptive services. With the addition of the pill, the Planned Parenthood Committee of Phoenix client base doubled, with over 200 new patients in 1961. The birth control pill cost $2.75 per month, making it unavailable to low-income women. Additionally, the organization [18] added several counseling services. It provided infertility [19] counseling to couples who were having difficulty getting pregnant. They also provided education for marriage, which included topics on healthy relationships, contraception [17], and sex.

The addition of new services and technology also indicated a need for more clinics throughout the region. In 1962 two new clinics were opened. On 8 June 1962, the Glendale Planned Parenthood clinic opened inside the First Christian Church in Glendale, Arizona, a suburb west of Phoenix. The Glendale clinic operated Friday nights by appointment. On 11 June 1962, the Planned Parenthood Committee of Phoenix opened an east suburb clinic in the United Church of Christ in Scottsdale, Arizona, open every Monday night. Both clinics were organized and run by the ministers of each clinic with health services provided by the Planned Parenthood Committee of Phoenix.

In addition to adding new services and clinic locations, Planned Parenthood Committee of Phoenix grew internally throughout the 1960s. Planned Parenthood volunteers divided among several subcommittees. Those subcommittees included: the nominating committee, personnel committee, campaign committee, special events committee, budget committee, planning committee, volunteer committee, publicity committee, and newsletter committee. Additionally, clergy, legal professionals, and medical professionals served in advisory positions. In 1962 the Planned Parenthood of Phoenix auxiliary was formed. The auxiliary served as a liaison between Planned Parenthood Committee of Phoenix and the general public. The auxiliary helped raise funds for the organization [10] and led awareness efforts.

Throughout the Planned Parenthood Committee of Phoenix’s early existence, fees for services were based on a sliding scale, making contraceptive services available to anyone regardless of income or socioeconomic status. However, as Planned Parenthood Committee of Phoenix relied solely on private donations up until the early 1970s, the organization [18] had to devote much of its time to fundraising. By the mid-1960s, the Planned Parenthood Committee of Phoenix began hosting large-scale public fundraising events.

Those events were largely led by Peggy Goldwater, a founder of the original Mother’s Health Clinic of Phoenix and wife of Arizona Republican Senator Barry Goldwater. Goldwater planned and hosted a 1965 banquet honoring Sanger and a 1967 event featuring the Chinese Opera Company of San Francisco, California. According to Planned Parenthood records, the latter event secured Planned Parenthood Committee of Phoenix a spot within Phoenix’s social sphere. That position gave Planned Parenthood Committee of Phoenix more financial backers and the ability to reach more of the community and to educate that community about the birth control [5] and reproductive rights [19] movement. In 1967, Planned Parenthood Committee of Phoenix received its first state grant money. That money, allocated from the Maricopa County Health department grants and from negotiated service contracts at the Phoenix Memorial Hospital, provided Planned Parenthood Committee of Phoenix with a budget for an inner city outreach program.

Planned Parenthood Committee of Phoenix continued to evolve and expand as the reproductive rights [19] movement continued throughout the mid-twentieth century. In 1965 the US Supreme Court in Washington, D.C., declared unconstitutional the remaining state laws prohibiting birth control in the case Griswold v. Connecticut [20](1965). That decision forestalled states from passing laws that attempted to restrict or ban women’s rights to contraception [12].

Toward the end of the 1960s, the rate of teen pregnancies increased dramatically in Arizona. In response to the overwhelming number of teen pregnancies, and the increasing number of teens seeking contraceptive services, Planned Parenthood Committee of Phoenix began providing contraception [12] to teenagers on their own consent, rather than requiring parental knowledge and consent. In 1968 the organization [10]’s board voted to serve minors without parental consent. By the start of the 1970s, over seventy percent of clients were single women under the age of twenty-five who chose to use contraceptives to delay childbirth.

Planned Parenthood Committee of Phoenix continued to grow and evolve throughout the 1970s, primarily due to changes in state and national support for family planning [8]. In 1970 the US Congress in Washington, D.C., passed the Public Health Services and Population Research Act, which allocated greater than 300 million dollars over a three-year period for service and research in the field of contraception [8] and family planning [10]. One of the sections of this act, called Title X, provided funding for family planning for low-income women.

New federal funding enabled Planned Parenthood to expand its contraceptive services. In 1970 the Arizona Planned Parenthood was one of the first affiliates to begin offering voluntary vasectomies, a surgical sterilization [5] procedure for men. Also in the 1970s, changing state and federal policies on abortions allowed for new alternatives for unwanted pregnancies. By the early 1970s, California was one of the few states in the US that had lenient abortion [21] laws. By the early 1970s, Planned Parenthood Committee of Phoenix began referring clients to California for voluntary abortions. The Arizona clinics would reserve blocks of airline seats and facilitate the travel for women who chose to go to California for abortions. However, due to the large financial cost of the travel, this option remained inaccessible to most women.

In 1973 the US Supreme Court ruled in Roe v. Wade [22] that a Texas law banning abortion [22] was unconstitutional, and it expanded women’s rights to privacy in reproductive healthcare to include abortions. The Supreme Court decision in the case legalized abortion [22] across the US within the first trimester [21] of pregnancy [19]. This decision forced many states, including Arizona, to overturn their restrictive abortion [22] laws.

Following Roe v. Wade [22], the Planned Parenthood Committee of Phoenix began offering abortions in 1976 at some of its clinic locations. In a newsletter, Planned Parenthood describes how the organization [10] had been referring patients to private physicians for abortions for several years. However in September 1976, some private physicians came to licensed Planned Parenthood clinics to perform abortions. They performed abortions only in the first ten weeks of pregnancies with vacuum aspiration procedures. Clients paid 135 dollars. Additionally, Planned Parenthood noted that the abortion [22] service was not promoted or publicized, but rather discussed only as an internal resource by counselors to provide patients with information about alternatives to unwanted pregnancies.

A growing client base caused the original Phoenix Planned Parenthood Clinic to outgrow its space at the Memorial Hospital. In 1973 the organization [10] began renovations on a new freestanding facility on the Memorial Hospital property. Later that year, the Phoenix clinic moved into its new independent location.

Throughout the late 1970s, Planned Parenthood continued to expand their family planning [8] services and advocacy for women’s reproductive rights [19]. In 1975 the organization [10] opened a clinic in Tempe, Arizona, to serve the college students at Arizona State University. Two years later in 1977, Planned Parenthood expanded outside of Maricopa County and opened a clinic in Globe, Arizona. In Fall of 1978, the Planned Parenthood Committee of Phoenix expanded to northern Arizona and opened a clinic in Flagstaff, Arizona. In response to that expansion, the organization [10] changed its name to Planned Parenthood of Central and Northern Arizona (PPCNA). Into the early decades of the twenty-first century, the PPCNA served Arizona residents with multiple clinics throughout the Central and Northern regions of Arizona.

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