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Incarcerated Women and Abortion Provision: A Survey of Correctional Health Providers

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CONTEXT: Many women entering jail or prison are pregnant, and correctional facilities are therefore an important venue for providing a range of pregnancy-related care, including access to abortion services. However, the availability of abortion services to inmates in the United States is unknown.

METHODS: Between October 2006 and March 2007, surveys about abortion provision were mailed to 951 health professionals who provided clinical care in correctional facilities. Descriptive statistics were tabulated, and measures of association were calculated using chi-square analysis.

RESULTS: Of the 286 respondents who returned analyzable surveys, 68% indicated that inmates at their facility can obtain "elective" abortions. Eighty-eight percent of this group indicated that their facility provides transportation, but only 54% said that they help arrange appointments. Responses did not differ by providers' individual or institutional characteristics. However, providers from states with a Republican-dominated legislature or with a Medicaid policy that severely restricted coverage for abortion were more likely to indicate that availability of abortion services was limited than were those whose state had a predominantly Democratic legislature or a Medicaid program that covered all or most medically necessary abortions.

CONCLUSIONS: Although incarceration does not preclude women's need for access to abortion, full access to services is not available in all settings. Improving women's overall health care in correctional settings should include increasing the accessibility of abortion services.

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» [table of contents](#)

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