



Separate Policies, Similar Harm: The Global Gag Rule and the Helms Amendment

As the world's number one global health donor, the U.S. has an obligation to support the provision of equitable, accessible health care globally. However, there are two major policies that currently interfere with and disrupt essential health care services: the "global gag rule" (GGR), and the Helms Amendment. These policies have devastating impacts on safe abortion access (and beyond) for millions of people in low- and middle-income countries, primarily harming people of color. While the harm they cause is similar, these policies do have distinct differences.

How They Are Implemented

The **Helms Amendment** was passed in 1973 and is embedded in the *Foreign Assistance Act* of 1961. It is renewed annually as part of the State and Foreign Operations Appropriations bill.

The **GGR** has been rescinded and reinstated by executive order along party lines ever since it was first introduced in 1984 – rescinded by Democrats, enacted by Republicans. Under the Trump/Pence administration, it was not only reinstated, but also significantly expanded.

What They Dictate

The **Helms Amendment** says that "no foreign assistance funds may be used to pay for the performance of abortion as a method of family planning* or to motivate or coerce any person to practice abortions."

In its original release, the **GGR** stated that the U.S. "does not consider abortion an acceptable element of family planning programs and will no longer contribute to those of which it is a part." Once expanded by the Trump/Pence administration, the policy moved beyond family planning programs and required all foreign NGOs receiving any type of U.S. global health assistance to agree that they "will not perform or actively promote abortion as a method of family planning or provide financial support to any other organization that conducts such activities."

What They Prohibit

The **Helms Amendment** prohibits the "performance of abortion as a method of family planning".

The **GGR** prohibits anything falling under the larger umbrella of abortion care, abortion counseling, abortion referrals, or advocacy of abortion law liberalization.

Who They Impact

The **Helms Amendment** applies to foreign (non-U.S.) NGOs, U.S. NGOs, country governments, and multilateral organizations. It prevents U.S. funding from directly supporting abortion care overseas.

The **GGR** applies to foreign (non-U.S.) NGOs. It restricts not only what these organizations can do with U.S. funds, but also how they spend money coming from any other source. If any money is allocated for abortion or abortion-related services, they will lose U.S. global health assistance.**

Legislative Solutions

Congress needs to pass the *Abortion is Health Care Everywhere Act* to permanently repeal the **Helms Amendment**.

Congress needs to pass the *Global Health, Empowerment and Rights (HER) Act* to permanently repeal the **GGR**.

What these dangerous anti-abortion policies have in common: they both put at risk the health, lives, and reproductive freedom of people across the world who have no say in U.S. policies, and they both must go.

*Despite only prohibiting abortion as a method of family planning in the written law, the Helms Amendment has been wrongly overinterpreted to include prohibiting post-abortion care, equipment, counseling, and abortion-related services.

**Prior to the Trump/Pence administration, the Global Gag Rule applied to international family planning and reproductive health funding. The Trump/Pence administration expanded the GGR to apply to all global health assistance.