

**Sex Ed, Medicaid, &
Abortion Access:
A trio of policies worth fighting for**

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This time on Code WACK!

Which states have received the highest scores in the rePROs Fight Back's 13th annual 50-state report card on sexual and reproductive health and rights released in March -- *and why?* And **what specific threats** - *whether federal, state or local* - **should reproductive rights advocates be most concerned about? And what policies should they be promoting?**

To find out, we spoke with **Jennie Wetter**, Director of the **rePROs Fight Back initiative** at [*The Population Institute*](#), where she champions sexual and reproductive health, rights, and justice every day. Jennie also hosts the [*rePros Fight Back Podcast*](#), offering deep dives into abortion access, birth control, sex ed, LGBTQ+ rights, and

This is part two of a powerful two-part series with Jennie.

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California, New Mexico, Oregon, Vermont, and Washington received top scores in the rePROs Fight Back's 13th annual 50-state report card on sexual and reproductive health. Why?

"I think it's important [to note] that **yes**, these are the states that are getting the best scores, **but no state got a hundred**. And even within that, that does not mean access to care is perfect or good. So ... there's always room for improvement. There are still people who are not getting access to services in those states. A statewide grade hides some of that ... I think sometimes those states get an A and think, "*Woo, we're good*," but actually there's still work to be done.

"I think one of the biggest things those states have is, um, they mandate sex education and that it's comprehensive sex education ... we want to make sure that young people are starting off with a good building block to make decisions later in their life. And so those states all did that.

"They have all made those Medicaid expansions to make sure that people are able to get, uh, affordable healthcare, which is so important.

"And then they don't have abortion restrictions or bans on gender affirming care." – **Jennie Wetter**

The report warns that the new administration in the White House could escalate attacks on reproductive rights. What specific federal threats should we be most concerned about?

" Oh man. I feel like that list is so long ...

"... the proposed slashing of Medicaid is, is really worrisome, not just for people who are going to lose Medicaid coverage, but ... it's important that

people understand it's gonna impact everybody. If state Medicaid plans are slashed, that means hospitals are not gonna get reimbursed for care for Medicaid care. So your small local community hospital may not be able to stay open. Then where are you gonna go to access care?

"So don't think this Medicaid fight is not your fight because it is, or it may be when you retire and if you need to go into a nursing home or, or, or, or there are so many ways that this could become your fight if it's not already your fight. So that is one big one.

"Two [others] that we're starting to hear about: There are threats to, uh, slashing HIV programs domestically that we've been hearing about ...

"And I just saw something today about slashing Title X again ... that low income family planning program ... where people can get the care they need. Um, and that could be really devastating ...

"... do not underestimate this administration. I think we all do so at our detriment. They are going to go after ... reproductive healthcare in so many other ways. Um, so I think it's just really important to keep an eye out and pay attention and make sure to let your Congress people know that you care and that you are watching what is happening." – **Jennie Wetter**

How can the report card help inform not only legislation and health policy, but also advocacy?

"I am inherently an *"information is power"* person. So I see the report card as like a really important first step.

"Like you don't know to push for better sex ed policies if you don't know, your state doesn't mandate it at all. And I think that's one of the things I think is really helpful with the report card. 'cause I think there are quite a few states where people think they're in a state that is doing really good things, but they still have real big gaps every year.

"I don't know why it continues to surprise me, but Massachusetts does not mandate sex education. Uh, you would've assumed that Massachusetts has really good scores on all of these things, but there are several states like that, where they have really good things and have been doing things to push for better policy.

"Minnesota and Michigan have really been doing a lot to change the reproductive health policy and make their states bastions for abortion, but then neither of them mandate sex education. So there are so many places where you can do more and I think this gives advocates but also state, state legislators, a game plan where they can see what needs to be changed.

"And I would encourage people who want to get involved to like find their local reproductive justice group and ... get involved on the ground. The battle is in the states.

"Yes, there will be big national battles and yes, you should call your senators and your state rep and your congressperson when those things are happening, but the state is where you are seeing a lot of these fights taking place and to get engaged at the state level is so important. And even sometimes the local level, right? Sex ed policy, yes, it varies widely from state to state, but it is also a school district by school district fight. So you can push your school district to have better policies as well." – ***Jennie Wetter***

Helpful Links

[The Population Institute](#)

[The State of Reproductive Health and Rights, a 50-State Report Card](#)
The Population Institute

[rePros Fight Back](#) Podcast, *The Population Institute*

[What Does the Recent Literature Say About Medicaid Expansion?: Impacts on Sexual and Reproductive Health](#), *KFF*

[The Importance of Access to Comprehensive Sex Education](#), *American Academy of Pediatrics*

[After Roe Fell: Abortion Laws by State](#), *Center for Reproductive Rights*

[Hyde and seek: How the Hyde Amendment impacts abortion care access in the United States](#), *Ibis Reproductive Health*

[Act For Sexual and Reproductive Health Care](#), *Planned Parenthood Action Fund*

Episode Transcript

Read the [episode transcript](#)

Guest Biography - Jennie Wetter

Jennie Wetter (she/her/hers) is the Director of the rePROs Fight Back initiative at the Population Institute, where she fights every day for reproductive health and rights.

Originally from Wisconsin, she has lived in Washington D.C for the last 20 years. She received her B.A. from the University of Wisconsin-Madison and her M.A. from the American University's School for International Service.

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