

Fake Clinics: The Facts

What is a Fake Clinic?

A fake clinic (sometimes known as a crisis pregnancy center) is a facility set up by anti-abortion activists whose goal is to provide anti-choice counseling in the effort to discourage people who are or think they may be pregnant from having abortions. With names that sound like real reproductive health clinics, exam rooms with medical equipment, and workers wearing medical scrubs or white coats, Fake Clinics mislead people into thinking they are real full-service reproductive health care providers. But they are often not licensed to provide any medical care or, at most, provide very limited medical services.

Fake clinics do not counsel pregnant people about all of their options—they actively counsel against abortion often using false or misleading information. They do not provide abortion or contraceptive care, prenatal care or emergency contraception, nor do they refer patients for that care elsewhere.

What are the goals of Fake Clinics?

The goal of any fake clinic is to prevent people from choosing abortion. Fake clinics are a critical element of the anti-choice movement's strategy. While they often claim to have the best interest of clients in mind, they exist solely to convince people that they should not terminate their pregnancy.

What tactics do Fake Clinics use?

Fake clinics use dishonesty and deception to pull people into their doors and prevent them from choosing to have an abortion. They are often intentionally located near full-service medical clinics that do offer abortion services in order to confuse patients. This practice is called "Co-location"—placing clinics next door, across the street, or even in the same building as an abortion clinic. They will often take it one step further by having a name that is intentionally similar to the real clinic's name.

They attract patients by offering free services (like pregnancy tests and sonograms) and financial support through pregnancy. They then commonly use medically inaccurate information about abortion, as a scare tactic.

How many Fake Clinics are there?

With more than 3,000 locations across the US, Fake clinics significantly outnumber health-care clinics that provide abortion services, which number under 2,000. Fake clinics are in every state, in both rural and urban areas. Their focus, though, is on low income areas where health services are particularly needed. In New York City alone, there are dozens of these facilities. In New York State, there are over 120 fake clinics.

Fake Clinics in the US date back to the legalization of abortion. The first Fake Clinic was opened in 1967 by Robert Pearson in Hawaii. In 1969, he founded the anti-choice Pearson Foundation, a St. Louis-based organization to assist local groups in setting up anti-abortion crisis counseling centers. Then, in 1984, Pearson authored a manual outlining the deceptive tactics that continue to characterize the behavior of many Fake Clinics, which is still used today.

Who pays for Fake Clinics?

The largest source of money for fake clinics comes from private donors, anti-choice groups, and religious groups. Often fake clinics are connected with large financial support networks that help with fundraising. 34 States use taxpayer money to support fake clinics. New York State does not fund fake clinics but, in NYC, some elected officials have used discretionary funds for fake clinics. In NYC, several fake clinics are a part of Expectant Mothers Care (EMC), a network that funds and provides organized support for individual clinics.

What are other terms I should know?

Fake clinics are also known as Crisis Pregnancy Centers, Fake Reproductive Health Centers, Crisis Resource Centers, Pregnancy Service Centers (LL17 term), Limited Service Pregnancy Centers, and Pregnancy Help Medical Clinics.

What are the other major concerns?

Fake clinics are working to increase their medical services so that they cannot be required to make disclosures to the contrary.

What laws protect me from Fake Clinics?

Under Local Law 17 of 2011, fake clinics in New York City must disclose whether or not they have a licensed medical provider supervising all services on site. This disclosure must be included on all advertising and in conversation with clients in person and on the phone. Additionally, the law includes privacy protections for clients, so that a fake clinic cannot legally share women's personal information with anyone. Fake clinics in violation of the law are subject to fines by the Department of Consumer Affairs.