

**BEYOND HEALTH SERVICES,  
PROFAMILIA COLOMBIA PROMOTES HEALTHY LIFESTYLES  
AND CHANGES THE WAY OF SEEING AND DOING THINGS**

**Liliana Schmitz  
Public Relations Manager  
Profamilia Colombia**

Profamilia is a private, not for profit but not for losing organization.

Doctor Fernando Tamayo, Profamilia's founder, recognized in 1965 the need for family planning in Colombia, especially among poorer women, and from the beginning, the goal was to promote and defend the right of family planning access.

Colombia's birth rate was among the highest in the world. Women had an average of seven children, and the country's population was rapidly increasing. Thanks to the efforts of PROFAMILIA Colombia around 25 million unwanted pregnancies have been prevented.

PROFAMILIA was the first organization in Latin America to use **radio** to promote family planning. It recognize that **men's involvement** and participation can make the difference in reproductive health services; in the early 1970's PROFAMILIA began offering surgical contraception in its clinics, first to men (in 1971) and then to women (1973).

Another approach to **delivering contraception** – social marketing – was initiated in 1973. Profamilia's Contraceptive Social Marketing program was part of its non-clinic-based services. Through the CSM program, PROFAMILIA supplied contraceptives subsidized prices to commercial outlets (pharmacies, supermarkets, etc.). In 1976, PROFAMILIA established **mobile units** to provide sterilization and other services in rural and marginalized areas.

The adolescents program was started in 1990 and is one of the few such programs specifically for young people in Colombia. **Training peer educators is a key component of this program which also provides an array of health services.**

In 1986 PROFAMILIA launched a **LEGAL SERVICES** program specializing in sexual and reproductive rights with a gender perspective. Ten years later PROFAMILIA established the **OFFICE FOR SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS AND GENDER**, in order to study, design and implement institutional policies on these issues.

Since 1990, and with governmental and international cooperation funding, PROFAMILIA has produced a **DEMOGRAPHIC AND HEALTH SURVEY**. In 1991 the new Colombian constitution explicitly recognized family planning as a basic human right. In 1991, Profamilia advocated to have Family Planning included in the new Constitution. In 2000, PROFAMILIA took a dramatic turn by incorporating sexual orientation in its programs and services. In 2001, PROFAMILIA started the distribution and sale of the first dedicated emergency contraception product. In 2006 the first LGBT community center began operation in Bogotá. PROFAMILIA was part of it. PROFAMILIA EDUCA, the virtual education project (focusing on gender and rights) was also launched that year

The lessons learned in 12 years of working with the IDPs and 20 years of offering services and education to adolescents through youth centers, guarantee experience and results.

In particular for adolescents there is a wide range of social, economic, administrative, and geographical barriers. These include under-employment, lack of negotiation skills, lack of knowledge and confidence to exercise their sexual and reproductive rights, violence and rape, sexual exploitation, limited power affecting their autonomy and not having influence in decision-making.

In 2009, nineteen percent of the total appointments by Profamilia and 10% of diagnostic exams were offered to young people between the ages of 13-24. Additionally, 286,153 planning methods (birth control pills, implants, condoms and injectables) were distributed to young people, which represent an increase of 8% from 2008.

Family planning is the most cost - effective strategy. It is important and necessary to renew the government and international commitment and responsibility to advocate for family planning in Latin America. Family planning is not an issue for our youth and adolescents, but unwanted pregnancy is leading the list of causes for school dropouts. Family planning has to be part of the international cooperation strategy of reducing poverty and reach development for our countries in Latin America. It is a long way to fulfill the unmet needs, more than ever for family planning.

Today, 45 years later, in a land of contradictions and severe social conflicts and tensions, it is PROFAMILIA'S commitment to continue to seek ways to improve the sexual and reproductive health of the Colombian people, especially the most vulnerable including youth and adolescents.

PROFAMILIA continues working to identify the best approaches to increase family planning for youth. Right now we have used innovative approaches, like using popular Colombian actors and singers as youth advocates.

It must be kept in mind, that beyond health services, PROFAMILIA promotes healthy lifestyles. The challenge is to maintain the social mission in a healthy (sustainable) organization.