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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON HEALTH, EDUCATION,
LABOR, AND PENSIONS

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6300

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<http://help.senate.gov>

January 25, 2022

Mr. Mark Zuckerberg
Chairman and Chief Executive Officer
Meta
1 Hacker Way
Menlo Park, California 94025

Dear Mr. Zuckerberg:

Over the past several years, a series of reports have described a pattern of Facebook and Instagram restricting access to women’s health information. A new report has now found that Facebook and Instagram block advertisements providing information on women’s health and sexual health, while allowing often graphic, sexual content targeted at men. I therefore request you explain Meta’s uneven application of its advertising policies and the steps you will take to immediately address this double standard.

According to a report from the Center for Intimacy Justice, Facebook and Instagram regularly reject advertisements for products, services, and information serving the health needs of women and people of diverse genders.¹ Based on a study of 60 companies, Facebook and Instagram have blocked ads from every organization surveyed on topics including consent education, breastfeeding, pelvic pain, incontinence, menopause, endometriosis, and other issues critical to women’s health. Facebook reportedly suspended half the surveyed companies’ entire ad accounts, often with little explanation or recourse.

Additionally, it appears Facebook applies its advertising policies unevenly depending on the gender of the target audience. According to the report and subsequent press coverage, in rejecting ads, Facebook often cited its policies that bar “adult products or services” and “adult content,” including “nudity” or “explicit or suggestive” depictions, when rejecting ads related to women’s health.² However, despite Facebook regularly blocking women’s health information, graphic ads targeting men—many with suggestive imagery or language on sexual performance or pleasure—were allowed.

This is not the only time Meta has been accused of inappropriately blocking women’s health information. In September, reporting revealed that Facebook and Instagram hid posts pertaining

¹ <https://docsend.com/view/phfstt65wzta5nw7>

² <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/11/style/facebook-womens-sexual-health-advertising.html>;
<https://docsend.com/view/phfstt65wzta5nw7>;
https://www.facebook.com/policies/ads/prohibited_content/adult_content;
https://www.facebook.com/policies/ads/prohibited_content/adult_products_or_services

to mifepristone and misoprostol, medications used in abortion care.³ In December, there were new reports that Facebook’s advertising enforcement restricts access to information on abortion related care.⁴ In response to several of these incidents, Facebook pointed to “mistakes” in its moderation process.⁵ However, these actions point to a pattern of stifling access to information on women’s health and sexual health, without any clear steps taken to address this self-described series of mistakes on your platforms.

Social media is often a critical tool for learning and sharing information, including health information. By preventing access to women’s health content, I am concerned Meta is actively preventing many of its users, especially women, from getting access to information that could support their health and well-being. To ensure you are applying your policies evenly and allowing access to health content across its platforms, I request you provide answers to the following questions no later than February 8, 2022.

1. Please provide any policies and procedures pertaining to:
 - a. The acceptance or rejection of advertisements for Facebook and Instagram, including the appeals process.
 - b. The review of advertisements after they are posted to Facebook or Instagram, including in response to reports by users.
 - c. The suspension of companies’ advertisement accounts, including the appeals process.
2. Which portions of these review processes involve automated tools or algorithms, and which portions involve review by Facebook or Instagram employees? Do all submitted advertisements undergo review by a Facebook or Instagram employee?
3. What training do employees receive pertaining to the advertisement review process, including on Facebook’s policies on Adult Products and Services and Adult Content, as well as on women’s health, sexual health, and reproductive health?
 - a. How often do reviewers receive this training?
 - b. Please provide copies of any materials used during such trainings.
4. How does Meta track information on acceptance or rejection of advertisements for Facebook or Instagram, including on the basis of certain policies, pertaining to particular subject matter, and targeted toward particular genders?
 - a. For each of the past three years, please provide the number of advertisements pertaining to Adult Products and Services or Adult Content submitted, accepted, or rejected by Facebook or Instagram, including the gender of the target audience and the subject matter of each ad. For rejected ads, please also include the grounds for the rejection, which rejections were appealed, and the results of this appeal.

³ <https://www.dailydot.com/debug/facebook-instagram-block-posts-abortion-pills-texas-law/>

⁴ <https://www.yahoo.com/now/abortion-rights-groups-tech-giants-110101279.html>

⁵ <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/11/style/facebook-womens-sexual-health-advertising.html>;
<https://www.dailydot.com/debug/facebook-instagram-block-posts-abortion-pills-texas-law/>

5. For each of the past three years, please provide the minimum, maximum, and average length of time for the appeals process for advertisements initially rejected on the basis of the Adult Products and Services or Adult Content policies.
6. What steps, if any, does Meta take to determine if there is gender bias in its moderation of advertisements and other content on Facebook or Instagram?
 - a. What steps, if any, does Meta take to determine if there are common issues in its moderation of content pertaining to women's health and sexual health across advertisements and other content?
 - b. Please provide any analyses of potential gender bias in Meta's policy enforcement practices over the past three years, as well as any steps the company has taken to address these issues.
7. How do Facebook and Instagram communicate with potential advertisers to communicate the reasons for rejecting advertisements, including small businesses and organizations offering products, services, and information pertaining to women's health and sexual health?
8. What steps, if any, has Meta taken in response to this latest report regarding Facebook and Instagram inappropriately blocking advertisements for products, services, and information pertaining to women's health and sexual health, including potential gender bias in the review process?

Please direct any questions and response to this letter to Yelena Tsilker on my staff at Yelena.Tsilker@help.senate.gov.

I appreciate your timely attention to this issue.

Sincerely,



PATTY MURRAY

Chair

U.S. Senate Committee on Health, Education,
Labor and Pensions