

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

May 17, 2019

Mr. Sundar Pichai
Chief Executive Officer
Google
1600 Amphitheatre Parkway
Mountain View, CA 94043

Dear Mr. Pichai,

It has come to our attention that Google has awarded tens of thousands of dollars in advertising grants to Obria Group, an organization that runs fake medical clinics with a history of falsely advertising medical services to pregnant women.¹ Google should in no way be subsidizing any misinformation campaigns, especially campaigns designed to deceive women about their own reproductive care options. Although we recognize, as per the company's most recent statement on this matter, that Google makes these grants available to "a diverse group that represents many different views and different causes," including both pro- and anti-choice organizations, it is unacceptable for Google to facilitate misinformation campaigns, regardless of ideology. We urge you to immediately stop funding this organization, remove its misleading ads from all Google platforms, and take steps to make sure this does not happen again.

Obria Group operates so-called "crisis pregnancy centers," or CPCs, which falsely and deliberately advertise themselves to potential clients as medically licensed healthcare providers offering a comprehensive array of reproductive health and family planning services, including abortion.² According to a 2014 analysis by NARAL Pro-Choice America ("NARAL"), "79 percent of the crisis pregnancy centers that advertised on Google indicated that they provided medical services such as abortions, when, in fact, they are focused on counseling services and on providing information about alternatives to abortion."³

Google should be well aware of the deceptive advertising practices of these types of organizations. Your company previously took numerous actions to remove advertisements for crisis pregnancy centers because they violate Google's internal advertising policy. For example, in 2014, following NARAL's analysis, Google found that many CPC advertisements indeed violated its policy against deceptive advertising and removed web search ads for some CPCs.⁴ In 2017, the company again removed CPC advertisements in response to an investigation by

¹ Stephanie Kirchgaessner and Jessica Glenza, "Google has given \$150,000 in free ads to deceptive anti-abortion group," *The Guardian*, April 13, 2019, https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2019/may/12/google-advertising-abortion-obria?CMP=share_btn_tw.

² Julie Tulbert, "Crisis pregnancy centers hurt people, and it's time the media noticed," *Media Matters*, Dec. 28, 2017, <https://www.mediamatters.org/blog/2017/12/28/crisis-pregnancy-centers-hurt-people-and-its-time-media-noticed/218904>.

³ Hayley Tsukayama, "Google removes 'deceptive' pregnancy center ads," *Washington Post*, April 28, 2014, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-switch/wp/2014/04/28/naral-successfully-lobbies-google-to-take-down-deceptive-pregnancy-center-ads/?utm_term=.24ed3b86c0c0.

⁴ Tsukayama, "Google removes 'deceptive' pregnancy center ads," 2014.

Rewire.News which revealed another batch of misleading advertisements.⁵ Last year, it was revealed that Google searches for Bay Area abortion providers would primarily yield results for anti-abortion clinics, while abortion providers such as Planned Parenthood were lower in the search results.⁶ When this came to light, a Google spokesperson said the company “actively enforce(s)” their “robust policies” against misleading ads.⁷

Many of these ads, however, continue to appear. Recently, when *The Guardian* presented Google with examples of ads for clinics that appear to offer abortion services but do not, the company said that any ads in violation of its policy would be taken down, but, several days later, those ads were still active.⁸

On its advertising support page, Google states, “We don't want users to feel misled by ads, so we strive to ensure ads are clear and honest, and provide the information that users need to make informed decisions. We don't allow ads or destinations that intend to deceive users by excluding relevant information or giving misleading information about products, services, or businesses.”⁹ It is baffling that Google continues, despite repeated violations of this policy, to not only allow CPCs to use its platform to provide misinformation to pregnant women, but awards funding for these deceptive ads.

Given Google's past acknowledgements that CPC ads violate the company's policy against deceptive advertising, we are appalled that Google reportedly awarded Obria Group nearly \$32,000 in 2011 and \$120,000 in 2015 in Google advertising grants.¹⁰ Your continued support of Obria Group's intentional misinformation campaigns denies women access to truthful information about their medical choices. We ask that you take immediate action to review and remove any advertisements for Obria or similar CPCs intended to mislead customers. We also urge Google to implement new policies and procedures to ensure that its advertising grants are not awarded to applicants who intentionally engage in deceptive advertising. Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,


CAROLYN B. MALONEY
Member of Congress


SUZANNE BONAMICI
Member of Congress

⁵ Nicole Knight, “Google Removes Misleading Anti-Choice Fake Clinic Ads. Again.” *Rewire.News*, Dec. 8, 2017, <https://rewire.news/article/2017/12/08/google-removes-misleading-anti-choice-fake-clinic-ads/>.

⁶ Ethan Baron, “Google points abortion-seekers towards anti-abortion clinics,” *Mercury News*, Feb. 12, 2018, <https://www.mercurynews.com/2018/02/12/google-points-abortion-seekers-toward-anti-abortion-clinics/>.

⁷ Baron, “Google points abortion-seekers towards anti-abortion clinics,” 2018.

⁸ Kirchaessner and Glenza, “Google has given \$150,000 in free ads to deceptive anti-abortion group,” 2019.

⁹ Google Advertising Policies Support Page, <https://support.google.com/adspolicy/answer/6020955?hl=en>.

¹⁰ Kirchaessner and Glenza, “Google has given \$150,000 in free ads to deceptive anti-abortion group,” 2019.