

Ann McGuinness, Major Fund-Raiser for Women's Health, Dies at 65

At Planned Parenthood and other organizations, she worked behind the scenes for reproductive rights and related causes.



Ann McGuinness in an undated photo. Credit...Carol Dronsfield

By [Neil Genzlinger](#)

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Ann McGuinness, a behind-the-scenes force in women's health and reproductive rights who raised vast amounts of money for Planned Parenthood and other groups and then was a founder of the [Contraceptive Access Initiative](#), which seeks to make hormonal birth control more available over the counter, died on Aug. 3 in Albany, N.Y. She was 65.

Her family said the cause was [leiomyosarcoma](#), an aggressive cancer.

Over the years [Ms. McGuinness](#), who lived in Selkirk, N.Y., south of Albany, applied her considerable skills as a fund-raiser to a variety of organizations, but her passion was women's issues. Beginning in the mid-1980s she worked for the National Women's Political Caucus, then for [NARAL Pro-Choice America](#) (originally the National Association for the Repeal of Abortion Laws), where she was development director.

In 2006 she began a 12-year career at the [Planned Parenthood Federation of America](#), where Cecile Richards, president of the organization during that time, traveled with her often and experienced her commitment to the cause.

“It was simply the movement’s good fortune that she chose to pour her talent and energy into fund-raising,” Ms. Richards said by email. “But make no mistake — she was a great fund-raiser because of her belief in the cause of abortion rights. Her competitive streak — and it was fierce — was because to her the mission was so important.”

Betsy Liley, who worked with Ms. McGuinness on fund-raising at Planned Parenthood, remembered her as a tireless colleague.

“Ann would arrive at the Manhattan Planned Parenthood Federation of America offices after a couple of hours on the train from her home just south of Albany,” she said by email. “She’d pull this dog-eared list of names out of her pocket or purse. It was handwritten in pencil. Sometimes the list had red wine stains on it from work the night before.”

“If your name was on that list,” Ms. Liley added, “you were going to hear from Ann. It could be years later. She was going to figure out how to connect you to the work she dedicated her life to.”

Ms. Richards recalled a particular trip with Ms. McGuinness that demonstrated her tenacity.

“One day we drove hours through southern Florida, to a remote and splendid villa on the coast, to meet with a potential donor who provided fresh-baked scones but no contribution,” she said. “We laughed all the way back, but Ann wasn’t despondent, she was simply committed. A year later, she got a million-dollar gift from the same woman. She didn’t take no for an answer.”

After leaving Planned Parenthood in 2018, Ms. McGuinness helped found the Contraceptive Access Initiative in 2020, working on the continuing effort to [make birth control pills and other contraception available to women without a prescription](#). Dana Singiser, who had worked with her at Planned Parenthood, was another founder of that initiative, though she said Ms. McGuinness was the driving force.

“She is one of those unsung heroes — raised literally hundreds of millions of dollars for reproductive rights and justice, and was a key strategist everywhere she worked,” Ms. Singiser said by email. “And she was a motivator to all of us around her — always focused on the mission, not her own profile.”

[Ann Catherine McGuinness](#) was born on July 27, 1957, in New Britain, Conn. Her mother, Catherine (Jones) McGuinness, taught elementary school, and her father, Edward, was a steamfitter.

Ms. McGuinness grew up in Newington, Conn., and earned a bachelor's degree in political science at what is now the University of St. Joseph in West Hartford in 1979. In 1984 she earned a master's degree in public administration at Columbia University.

After working for the National Women's Political Caucus and for the campaign of the Colorado Democrat [Tim Wirth](#), during his successful 1986 run for the United States Senate, Ms. McGuinness joined NARAL in 1987. She worked for that organization for 17 years as a consultant and development director before her move to Planned Parenthood.

One important aspect of her work in all her roles, Ms. Richards said, was mentoring a younger generation of fund-raisers for women's causes.

"She understood that her own success would be exponentially greater if there were hundreds more trained and committed as she was," Ms. Richards said.

Ms. McGuinness is survived by her husband, William T. Reynolds; a daughter, Nora McGuinness Reynolds; a son, Nicholas McGuinness Reynolds; two brothers, Patrick and Timothy McGuinness; and a sister, Mary Kate Hallisey.

If Ms. McGuinness was passionate about particular causes, she also saw the value of giving in general. In an opinion article for The Times Union of Albany in 2010, when the American economy was still recovering from the recession of the previous three years, she made a plea aimed at non-millionaires.

"Private support established schools, libraries, hospitals and firehouses," she wrote. "As the high unemployment rate persists and the economy stalls, philanthropy will be called upon again to make our communities whole.

"Open the letters from your favorite charities. Give and give again. Don't be concerned that the gifts are not as big as Rockefeller's. Our gifts have an impact — no matter the size."