

Free Contraception Service Welcomed but Should be Easier to Access



Women should have the choice to access contraception in pharmacies without prescription from GP

The announcement today of a new service to provide free contraception for women aged 17-25 has been warmly welcomed by the Irish Pharmacy Union (IPU). This service will significantly reduce costs barriers which prevent people using contraception effectively.

However, the IPU has said that barriers to accessibility remain, and recommend that the service should be expanded to provide the option of accessing oral contraception, directly from their local pharmacy, through consultation with a pharmacist and be aligned to the model of care and access provided for in the emergency hormonal contraception service.

Community pharmacist and Chair of the IPU's Pharmacy Contractors' Committee, Kathy Maher said, "This is a very welcome and positive development for the healthcare of young women in Ireland. The ambition of this plan is to ensure that women can access the contraception they

need, and it successfully removes cost as a barrier of doing so for younger women. We must now focus on ensuring that access is not a barrier either.

“This new service quite rightly gives women the choice over what form of contraception they wish to use. However, they are not being provided with a choice on where to access this contraception. Young women who wish to use oral contraception (the pill) should be able to access it directly from pharmacies without first having to get a prescription from a GP.”

“The Pill is available prescription free in the UK, US, Canada and New Zealand. It is a safe and well-studied medicine and has been used by women for almost half a century. Where there is no clinical need for a patient to go to a GP to access the pill, they should not be made to do so.”

Kathy Maher outlined that pharmacies already have experience providing women with contraception in Ireland. “Ireland’s pharmacies began dispensing emergency hormonal contraception (the morning after pill) without prescription since 2011. This has been a hugely welcome boost to healthcare services available to women. Now is an appropriate time to expand the role of pharmacies in providing contraceptive care.”

“This is about providing appropriate choice. Research has shown that almost half of Irish women would prefer accessing contraception direct from a pharmacy. For those women, this should be an option. Cost is not the only barrier to women availing of contraception. Getting access to contraception is also a clear challenge, particularly with the current length of GP waiting lists.”

Kathy Maher concluded, “Healthcare today should be about providing appropriate care with the least amount of complexity. Requiring women to go to their GPs for contraception creates needless complexity and unnecessary barriers.”