

International Women's Day



Pharmacists calls for greater choice for women in contraceptive care

The Irish Pharmacy Union (IPU) has called for government to expand the accessibility of the free contraception scheme for young women. The IPU has said that women should be given the choice to access contraception directly from their pharmacist, on foot of a structured consultation. This will provide women with even more options to safely and effectively manage their reproductive health and wellbeing.

Speaking on International Women's Day, pharmacist and Chair of IPU's PCC Committee Kathy Maher explained the benefits of expanding choices to women. "Pharmacies are easily accessible and located in practically every town and village in the country. Women can visit their pharmacy at times that suit them in evenings or weekends. Women should have the choice to avail of this convenience to access contraception."

Many women already opt to access emergency hormonal contraception through pharmacies, explained Ms Maher. "Pharmacists are experienced at providing contraceptive care and have been safely providing the emergency contraception, over the counter since 2011. The

profession is trained and has the experience to review patients to determine if it is safe to dispense contraception without referring to a GP.

“Pharmacists’ experience has taught us that many women prefer to access contraception from their pharmacies. Where this is their preference, they should have that choice. This is a view that is now shared by the World Health Organisation, who recommended in 2019 that oral contraception should be available without prescription.”

“The introduction of the scheme to offer free contraception was extremely welcome. It is now set to be expanded this year in another positive development for women. However, without enlisting pharmacies, this expansion will add further pressure to GPs, while also making it more challenging for women to access the scheme. Better healthcare means using all of our primary care resources effectively. Allowing young, healthy women to access contraception from a range of healthcare providers improves choice and by extension, access, thus making an important service available to even more women.

Concluding, Ms Maher said, “we are calling on the Minister for Health to revise the new free contraception scheme, providing women the choice to access the pill in their pharmacies. This should be implemented before the planned expansion of the scheme in the coming months.”