

IPU calls on Minister Donnelly to follow through with his commitment to Free Contraception Scheme



- **Introduction of free contraception should utilise Pharmacies**
- **Viability of free contraception greatly enhanced if women can access directly without prescription**

24 September 2021: The Irish Pharmacy Union (IPU) has said plans to introduce free contraception for women in Budget 2022 would be greatly enhanced by placing pharmacies at the heart of this service. The IPU has been calling for free access to female contraception for several years and for the prioritisation of women's health. It has re-iterated this call in its pre-budget submission which has been provided to the Minister for Health, Stephen Donnelly.

Kathy Maher, a community pharmacist and Chairperson of the IPU Pharmacy Contractor's Committee said "Earlier this month Minister Donnelly stated that it was his ambition to introduce free contraception for women in the upcoming budget. This would be an extremely progressive development. However, placing pharmacies at the centre of any free contraception scheme would undoubtedly improve its efficiency."

The IPU's pre budget submission also advocates for oral contraception (the Pill) to be available without prescription. According to Maher "this would make access as easy as possible for women and greatly reduce pressure on GPs. Eliminating the requirement for GP involvement would be significantly more cost effective for the Government."

“Previous research in Ireland has shown that almost half of women would favour being able to access contraception from a pharmacy, so the Minister should follow through to ensure that this becomes a reality. The barriers to accessing contraception are not all financial; non-financial barriers to access, including the need to get a doctor’s prescription, often cause even greater difficulty and need to be addressed urgently.

“The Pill is one of the most widely used forms of contraception in the world. It is a safe and well-studied medicine and has been used by women for almost half a century. Pharmacists would be provided with training on the dispensing of the pill and on the selection and supply of the most suitable contraception.”

Ms Maher also warned that Ireland should not fall behind its European counterparts, “France will offer free contraceptives for women up to the age of 25 from 2022 and women in the UK will be allowed to access two types of contraceptive pill over the counter after a short consultation with their pharmacist. Ireland must do the same and ensure that women can directly access contraception in pharmacies as it has been shown to be safe and effective in other countries.”

Kathy Maher concluded, “We welcome the Minister’s ambitions and we hope that they are implemented without delay. Providing women with better access to contraception by making it free and available without prescription means they will be given the freedom of choice and unwanted pregnancies will be reduced.”

ENDS

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