

Pharmacists welcome National Women's Council of Ireland call for greater choice in contraceptive care



Prescription-free access to contraception, which is increasingly available in other countries, should be made available for Irish Women

27 October 2022: The Irish Pharmacy Union (IPU) has welcomed the call from the National Women's Council of Ireland (NWCi) for pharmacists to be able to supply oral contraception without a prescription, which would support women accessing these services.

According to 'Every Woman: Towards Reproductive Health, Choice and Care for All' a new NWCi report launched on 25 October. The NWCi recommended the "Use of our pharmacist network as well as our GPs

could help to ensure we reach all women and people who menstruate and enable equal access to reproductive healthcare.”[1] The IPU has consistently called for increasing access to contraception to by allowing pharmacists to supply these medicines following a consultation without first having to get a prescription from a GP.

Community Pharmacist and Chair of the IPU’s PCC Committee, Kathy Maher, explained the benefits of expanding access to contraception. “With over 1,900 pharmacies nationwide and over 85% of the population living within 5km of their nearest one, pharmacies provide a straightforward and convenient point of access to many treatments and services. Just as women have the choice over what form of contraception they wish to use; they should also be given the choice of where they can access it.

“The introduction in September of the Free Contraception Service for 17-25 year olds and the planned expansion of a scheme removed the barrier of cost for those requiring contraception and is extremely welcome. However, as the ‘Report of the Working Group on Access to Contraception’ identified back in 2019, access to local services was a significant barrier to women utilising contraception. With GP waiting lists growing this is a needless bottleneck for women when they could simply access contraception from their local pharmacy.”

“This is a service that is freely accessible in over 100 countries around the world. This includes in the USA, Canada, New Zealand and our nearest neighbour the UK. The WHO is supportive of pharmacists supplying contraception without a prescription. The medicines used in contraceptive care are well tolerated and can be managed through a structured pharmacist consultation, as demonstrated in these models of care.”

“This is about providing appropriate choice. Research has shown that almost half of Irish women would prefer to access contraception direct from a pharmacy. For those women, this increased accessibility should be an option.”

“Pharmacists are experienced at providing contraceptive care services”, Ms Maher explained.

Concluding, Kathy Maher said, “Emergency hormonal contraception (the morning-after pill) has been available without prescription in pharmacies since 2011. Enabling pharmacists to supply other forms of contraception without prescription will allow pharmacists to provide follow on

reproductive care for these patients.”

[1]

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