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Dear Working Group Member,

In this update we highlight two recent studies related to over-the-counter (OTC) access to oral contraceptives (OCs). The first is a cost modeling study that estimated the reduction in unintended pregnancy among low-income women that might be expected with a future OTC pill depending on what women would have to pay for it. The analysis found that it would be cost effective for insurers to fully cover a future OTC OC. The study was featured in a great piece in the [Huffington Post](#). The second study explored women's perceptions of an age restriction for a future OTC OC.

We also include information below on two public opinion polls that were conducted in October 2014 about women's and men's support for OTC access to OCs. Both polls found that a majority of respondents thought that the pill should be available OTC. We have also added a [new section](#) to the working group website that includes this public opinion data.

OCs OTC continues to be covered widely in the press, and we include links to recent articles below. We also include information about initiatives in Australia and New Zealand to reclassify certain formulations of OCs to be able to be prescribed by pharmacists.

Please let me know if you have any questions or comments about any of this information.

Thanks,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Dan", is placed below the text "Thanks,".

Daniel Grossman, MD
Vice President for Research, Ibis Reproductive Health

New research finds that insurance coverage of a future OTC OC would result in more widespread use by women and would be cost effective to health insurance plans

[A new study](#) published in the journal *Contraception* finds that use of an OTC birth control pill would be highest among low-income women--and would therefore have the biggest impact on unintended pregnancy--if it were fully covered by insurance. Using data from published surveys on contraceptive use and women's interest in an OTC pill, researchers from the University of California, San Francisco and Ibis Reproductive Health estimated that if the pill were fully covered by insurance, there would be an increase of 11%-21% in the number of low-income women using the birth control pill. Most of those new users would be previous users of a birth control method less effective than the pill or women using no method at all, resulting in a reduction of unintended pregnancy by 7%-25%. This would be cost effective for health insurance plans because it will likely reduce medical expenditures on unintended births.

Citation: Foster DG, Biggs, MA, Phillips KA, Grindlay K, Grossman D. Potential Public Sector Cost-Savings from Over-the-Counter Access to Oral Contraceptives. In press at *Contraception*. Please email [Ella](#) if you would like a copy of the manuscript.

New study explores women's perspectives on an age restriction for a future OTC OC

An article was recently published on women's perspectives on an age restriction for a future OTC OC, including predictors of supporting a restriction. Only a minority of women (26%) supported an age restriction; however, half (46%) were unsure. The sizeable proportion of women who were unsure but who may be open to being swayed by the evidence illustrates the need to address women's concerns through ongoing research and an informational campaign with the wider public. Some of these concerns related to teen safety and proper use of an OTC pill, which will be addressed with required research for an OTC switch. Other issues, including misperceptions that teens might have sex more often with better access to birth control, are not evidence-based and are an opportunity for education.

The abstract is available [here](#). Please email [Ella](#) if you would like a copy of the manuscript.

Citation: Grindlay K, Grossman D. Women's perspectives on age restrictions for over-the-counter access to oral contraceptives. *J Adolesc Health*. 2015; 56(1):38-43.

Recent public opinion polling indicates widespread support for OTC access to OCs

Leading up to the midterm elections, two new polls surveyed public opinion about OTC access to OCs. The [October 2014 Reason-Rupe National Survey](#), performed among 1,004 adults living in the continental United States, asked the following question: "Do you think it should be legal or illegal for adult women to purchase birth control pills or patches over the counter without a doctor's prescription?" Respondents could select legal, illegal, or don't know. Telephone interviews were made using mobile (503) and landline (501) phones, including 276 respondents without landlines, from October 1-6, 2014. The poll found that 70% of Americans supported legalizing over-the-counter birth control pills and patches without a doctor's prescription, 26% were opposed, and 4% were unsure. These findings show growing support since [May 2013](#),

when Reason-Rupe last asked this question and found 66% of respondents in support. The October poll showed that women across income groups support OTC OCs at roughly the same rates, with 65% of women making less than \$30,000 a year, 70% of women making \$30K-\$60K a year, and 67% of women making more than \$60,000 a year in support. Among men, support was also high, with 71% in favor (compared to 68% of women overall). In addition, support was high across race and ethnicity groups: 72% of White respondents, 73% of African-American respondents, and 61% of Hispanic respondents reported OTC OCs should be permitted. Finally, Republicans and Democrats supported the proposal at roughly the same level (65% and 69% respectively), with Independents the most in favor (74%).

[The Associated Press-GfK poll](#), conducted October 16-20, 2014 with 1,608 adults using KnowledgePanel, GfK's probability-based panel designed to be representative of the US population, asked: "In general, do you think that birth control pills should be: sold over the counter, only sold with a prescription, not sold at all. Overall 53% supported over-the-counter access.

These new polls, which are the first to ask representative samples of both women and men about their perspectives on an OTC switch, show broad support. They complement earlier, peer-reviewed research on public opinion, which you can find on the [Working Group website](#).

Australia and New Zealand considering proposals to allow several formulations of OCs to be prescribed by pharmacists

Applications have been submitted to the drug regulatory authorities in Australia and New Zealand to reclassify several formulations of OCs to a category of drugs that would allow prescription by pharmacists. Pharmacists would screen women for medical eligibility for OCs and provide counseling about the method. A similar proposal was reviewed last year in New Zealand and was rejected because of lack of support by physicians. Below are links to articles in the press about these applications:

- Australia: [Contraceptive pills available without a prescription under a proposal considered by the Therapeutic Goods Administration](#)
- New Zealand: [Contraceptive pill could soon be available over the counter](#)

Free the Pill Valentine's Day campaign

Leading up to Valentine's Day, we launched a campaign for [Free the Pill](#) called "I Heart My Pill." From February 11-14, we released a set of unique shareable images on Facebook and Twitter that were designed by Megan Smith of the [Repeal Hyde Art Project](#). We also created English and Spanish language [signs](#) that people could print out and take a selfie with and then post with the hashtags #iheartmypill and #freethepill. While the shareable images were specific to Valentine's Day, we still encourage people to take picture with a sign--if you have not taken one yet, we'd love for you to join us in spreading the word!

The campaign was a great success--our kick-off post garnered 719 likes, comments, and shares, and since the launch, we have gained 300 new Facebook followers on our [Free the Pill page](#), and doubled our followers on [Twitter](#).

Thanks to many of you for celebrating Valentine's Day with us by helping us call for a safe, effective, and accessible OTC birth control pill in the US.



Recent media coverage related to OCs OTC

- CBS 2 Iowa. OTC birth control debate. CBS 2 Iowa. 2015 March 3. [Click here to access](#)
- Uffalussy JG. What if birth control was available on drugstore shelves? Yahoo! 2015 March 2. [Click here to access](#)
- Zaragovia V. Over-the-counter birth control could reduce unintended pregnancies, research says. KUT.org. 2015 March 2. [Click here to access](#)
- Barbato L. Over-the-counter birth control could be huge for women--with one exception. Bustle. 2015 February 28. [Click here to access](#)
- Bassett L. Over-the-counter birth control may be a game-changer. Huffington Post. 2015 February 27. [Click here to access](#)
- Ferris S. Study: Over-the counter birth control could reduce unplanned pregnancies by one-quarter. The Hill. 2015 February 27. [Click here to access](#)
- The Inquisitr. Over-the-counter birth control pills could decrease unplanned pregnancies by 25 percent. The Inquisitr. 2015 February 27. [Click here to access](#)
- Marcotte A. Republicans dropped that whole over-the-counter birth control thing really quickly. RH Reality Check. 2015 February 11. [Click here to access](#)
- Munro Prescott H. New website promotes over-the-counter birth control pills. Philly.com. 2015 January 27. [Click here to access](#)
- Akoukou Thompson N. Birth control is essential to a woman's economic security, yet

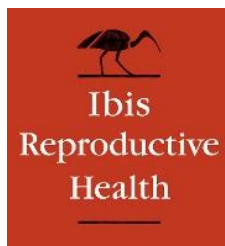
barriers persist for non-white, low income women. Latin Post. 2015 January 6. [Click here to access](#)

- Barbato L. Everything changed for birth control in the United States in 2014. Bustle. 2015 January 3. [Click here to access](#)
- National Partnership for Women and Families. Reproductive health group launches website promoting OTC birth control pills. National Partnership for Women and Families. 2014 December 17. [Click here to access](#)
- Gandal-Powers M. We've all been there, and an over-the-counter pill should be there for us. National Women's Law Center. 2014 December 15. [Click here to access](#)
- Weingus L. Where to go for all your questions about getting birth control without a prescription. The Huffington Post. 2014 December 15. [Click here to access](#)
- Talbot M. The pill's difficult birth. The New Yorker. 2014 November 11. [Click here to access](#)

About us

The Oral Contraceptives (OCs) Over-the-Counter (OTC) Working Group is an informal coalition of reproductive health and rights organizations, nonprofit research and advocacy groups, university-based researchers, and prominent clinicians who share an interest in women's health and access to contraception. Our goal is to evaluate objectively the risks and benefits of demedicalizing contraceptive care, with an eye toward improving access to OCs and potentially other hormonal contraceptive methods by making them available without a prescription.

The working group is coordinated by Ibis Reproductive Health.



www.ibisreproductivehealth.org

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