

May 28, 2020

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### **Dear Working Group member,**

As the weeks under stay-at-home and social distancing recommendations go by, I hope this newsletter finds you healthy, and that you are finding comfort and support with your loved ones and within your communities.

I wanted to let you know that due to the continued public health crisis, we made the difficult decision to shift our 2020 Oral Contraceptives Over-the-Counter Working Group annual meeting and World Contraception Day activities to virtual formats. Please see below for more information, and continue to hold September 23-24 in your calendars.

Earlier this month, many of you joined us for a very exciting and successful Free the Pill Week of Digital Action leading up to Free the Pill Day on May 9--we are so grateful for your support during this challenging and uncertain time! Together we called attention to the barriers to birth control access, acknowledged the history of structural inequities, including systemic racism and colonialism, that continue to impact contraceptive choice for communities of color today, highlighted the widespread and ever-growing support for bringing the pill over the counter in the United States, and stressed why now, perhaps more than ever, we need OTC access! If you were unable to attend "Acknowledging Puerto Rican Women: The Journey to Free the Pill from its Past," a webinar hosted by [Ibis Reproductive Health](#) and working group member [California Latinas for Reproductive Justice](#), the recording is [available here](#). We encourage you to share this resource with your networks.



It's time to Free the Pill.  
May 9

#FreeThePill

In this update, we share a recently published study led by Allie Wollum, senior project manager at [Ibis Reproductive Health](#), in collaboration with Dan Grossman, director of [Advancing New Standards in Reproductive Health](#) and working group steering committee member, which looks at the impact of out-of-pocket costs of an over-the-counter progestin-only pill (POP), and unintended pregnancy rates at different price points.

We also provide an update from the [Advocates for Youth #FreeThePill Youth Council](#) as well as state and federal policy updates.

We look forward to working with you virtually in the coming months as we continue to build momentum for an over-the-counter pill that is affordable, covered by insurance, and available to people of all ages!

With gratitude,

Britt Wahlin  
Vice President for Development and Public Affairs  
Ibis Reproductive Health

## Update: Annual working group meeting and World Contraception Day activities

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and the uncertainty of travel restrictions, the Free the Pill team and working group steering committee have decided to cancel our in-person September activities. In addition, the [American Society for Emergency Contraception](#) (ASEC) has also decided to cancel their in-person EC Jamboree, which was going to take place on September 22.

The FTP team and ASEC are looking into alternative ways to host their annual meetings virtually. We ask that you continue to save the dates of September 23 and 24 for our virtual working group meeting and World Contraception Day activities. ASEC's planning committee is developing plans for a virtual gathering--to stay informed as plans evolve, please join ASEC's listserv by emailing [Kelly Cleland](#). Stay tuned for more updates and information on our September activities. If you have any questions or ideas for us, please reach out to [Jess Sanchez](#).

## Modeling the impacts of price of an OTC POP in *Women's Health Issues*

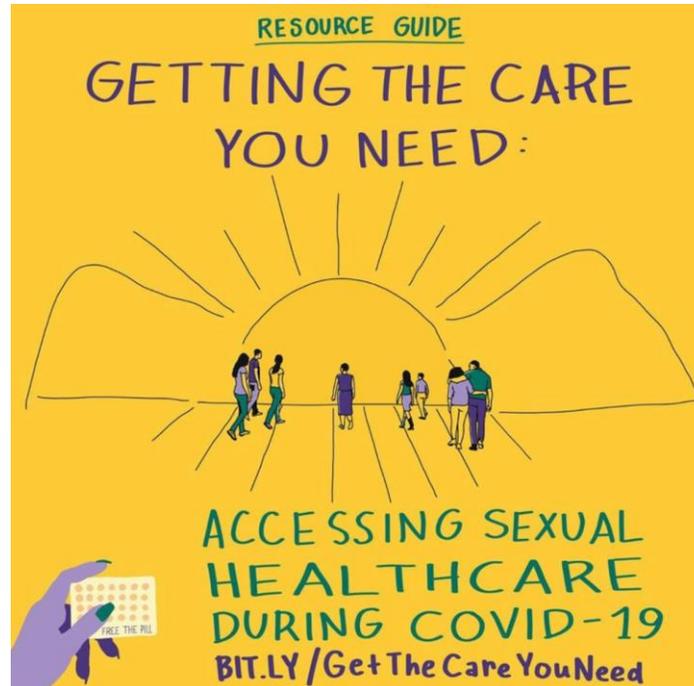
Earlier this year, *Women's Health Issues* published a study by researchers from [Ibis Reproductive Health](#) and [Advancing New Standards in Reproductive Health](#) looking at the impact of the out-of-pocket cost of an over-the-counter progestin-only pill on use of the pill as well as potential changes in population unintended pregnancy rates at different price points. The study showed that at low and no out-of-pocket cost, a large population of women in the US might likely use an OTC POP translating to decreases of 0% to 16% in unintended pregnancies, although willingness to pay differed by socioeconomic status. This study supports the need for a low retail price and insurance coverage to provide equitable access to this method for low-income populations across the United States and to fill current gaps in contraceptive access.

**Wollum A, Trussell J, Grossman D, Grindlay K.** Modeling the impacts of price of an over-the-counter progestin-only pill on use and unintended pregnancy among U.S. women. *Women's Health Issues*. 2020. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.whi.2020.01.003>

For access to the full-text paper, please email [Jess Sanchez](#).

## AFY #FreeThePill Youth Council update

[Advocates for Youth](#) and the [#FreeThePill youth activist cohort](#) held a variety of digital actions and events leading up to Free the Pill Day, including a webinar featuring celebrity sexologist Shan Boodram and steering committee members Dan Grossman and Tyunique Nelson, and sponsored by the office of Rep. Ayanna Pressley. #FreeThePill youth activists also worked with *Revire* editor Tiffany Tso to produce a [video](#) on choosing the right birth control method, as well as an IGTV video explaining why they think birth control should be available over the counter. Advocates for Youth also released [Getting the Care You Need](#), a resource guide to accessing sexual health services under social distancing guidelines.



## Policy updates

**State policy:** Many state legislatures across the country ended early or paused due to the pandemic, while others continued in different ways. Earlier this year, several states introduced bills that included OTC contraceptive coverage provisions: Hawaii, Michigan, Minnesota, and Virginia. In addition, this year New Jersey signed into law a bill that includes insurance coverage for OTC contraceptive drugs without a prescription.

**SCOTUS:** The Supreme Court of the United States heard a challenge to the Trump administration's rules that allow virtually any employer or university to deny birth control coverage guaranteed by the Affordable Care Act. Oral arguments were held on Wednesday, May 6. The [National Women's Law Center](#) in coordination with many other reproductive health, rights, and justice organizations, held a [#HandsOffMyBC digital rally](#) the day before to make it clear that everyone deserves access to birth control no matter where they work or go to school. While we wait for the Supreme Court's decision, these blog posts from the [ACLU](#), [Guttmacher Institute](#), and the [National Women's Law Center](#), all working group members, give analyses on what is at stake in this important case.

**Federal policy:** The Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act, also known as the [CARES Act](#), includes a provision allowing people to use their HSA, FSA, or HRA to purchase OTC medications without a prescription. Previously, people were not able to use their pre-tax dollars from these accounts to purchase products like emergency contraception without a prescription. While this benefit may be useful to those with such accounts, it is not a solution to affordability for everyone. As a coalition, we are working to ensure that all OTC contraception is fully covered by insurance without a prescription, copayments, or cost sharing.

The [Guttmacher Institute](#) published a [policy analysis](#) outlining nine steps Congress should take to ensure sexual and reproductive health care during this pandemic, including requiring all health insurance plans to cover OTC contraceptive methods, without a prescription or copayments, as well as extended supplies of contraceptives, HIV medication and other essential drugs.

## Media highlights

In celebration of Free the Pill Day, Lauren Schenk, working group steering committee member, wrote an op-ed for [PopSugar](#) about why the COVID-19 pandemic makes it even harder for young people to access birth control right now.

*"With people encouraged to stay home and resources being directed toward managing the public health crisis, requiring a prescription to get birth control pills serves as a roadblock to care that can disproportionately impact young people like the ones I grew up with."*

In an interview with [Babygaga](#), Kelly Blanchard, president of [Ibis Reproductive Health](#) and working group steering committee member, talked about the significance behind Free the Pill Day, the importance of an over-the-counter birth control pill, and why the COVID-19 pandemic highlights why we need an affordable and accessible birth control option now more than ever.

*"The current public health crisis is also highlighting some of the same disparities in access to health care for people struggling to make ends meet, people of color, young people, and immigrants. Birth control is critical to everyone's health and well-being--regardless of where you live, how much money you have, or whether you have health insurance."*

In [Refinery29](#), Rebecca Thimmesch, campaign manager for the [#FreeThePill campaign at Advocates for Youth](#), a working group member, called on Congress to ensure an over-the-counter birth control pill is covered by insurance.

*"Despite these attacks, we continue our work towards a better future. Right now, we're calling on members of Congress to do their part by ensuring an over-the-counter pill would be covered by insurance."*

Lead author of the "Modeling the Impacts of Price of an Over-the-Counter Progestin-Only Pill on Use and Unintended Pregnancy among U.S. Women" study, Allie Wollum, senior project manager at Ibis Reproductive Health, spoke with [Nashville Medical News](#) about the results of this important study.

*"As people struggle with mounting job losses and economic insecurity as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, they must be able to obtain an affordable birth control pill over the counter to control their reproductive health. This study highlights the need for low or no out-of-pocket cost progestin-only birth control pills that are available over the counter to better meet people's healthcare needs."*

## Quick call to action

Click to Tweet:

[If you can't get to the doctor during this time and need to get birth control pills, you have options. Check out this resource for where you can get a prescription for birth control online: http://freethepill.org/online-pill-prescribing-resources/ #FreeThePill](http://freethepill.org/online-pill-prescribing-resources/)

## Statement of purpose

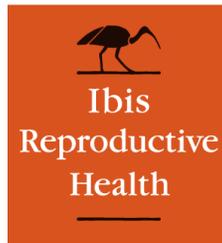
We are pleased to highlight the organizations that have recently signed onto our [statement of purpose](#)! Please help us demonstrate the wide support that exists for making OCs available OTC in the United States. [Email Mary](#) if you would like your organization to sign-on!

[California Women's Law Center](#)

## About us

The Oral Contraceptives (OCs) Over-the-Counter (OTC) Working Group is a coalition of reproductive health, rights, and justice organizations, nonprofit research and advocacy groups, university-based researchers, and prominent clinicians who share a commitment to providing all women of reproductive age easier access to safe, effective, acceptable, and affordable contraceptives. The working group was established in 2004 to explore the potential of over-the-counter access to oral contraceptives to reduce disparities in reproductive health care access and outcomes, and to increase opportunities for women to access a safe, effective method of contraception, free of unnecessary control, as part of a healthy sexual and reproductive life.

The working group is coordinated by Ibis Reproductive Health.



[www.ibisreproductivehealth.org](http://www.ibisreproductivehealth.org)

## Contact us

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