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Dear Working Group member,

Last month, more than 110 members of our OCs OTC Working Group gathered in Washington, DC for our annual working group meeting. This meeting was particularly special for me and to the history of our coalition as we welcomed four young people to our steering committee, progressing on our new youth-adult partnership model in collaboration with Advocates for Youth. Please join me in welcoming Carmen Leibrock (NARAL Pro-choice CO), Lauren Schenk (Girls Inc.), Micaela Gaviola (Indiana University), and Tyunique Nelson (Advocates for Youth)!

We also recently welcomed Debra Hauser (president, Advocates for Youth) and Krishna Upadhyia (senior medical advisor, Planned Parenthood Federation of America) to our steering committee. You can view our full steering committee [here](#).

We also invite you to join us for a webinar **tomorrow, October 22 from 1-2pm ET** on the potential impact of OTC oral contraceptives on low-income women in rural Iowa with working group member Tara Shochet (Gyunity Health Projects). [Register here!](#)

In this update, we share highlights and photos from our engaging and thought-provoking annual meeting as well as our successful World Contraception Day activities, both on the ground in DC and on social media. We also summarize the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists Committee Opinion on over-the-counter access to the full range of hormonal contraception for people of all ages, which was released just before our events in DC.

Thank you to everyone who joined us in DC and on social media for World Contraception Day and our annual meeting!

Warm regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kate". The letters are cursive and fluid, with a long vertical stroke for the 'k' and a simple 'ate' following.

Kate Grindlay Kelly
Project Director/Associate
Ibis Reproductive Health

2019 OCs OTC Working Group annual meeting recap

On September 27, OCs OTC Working Group members gathered for our 15th annual meeting in Washington, DC. The meeting included an overview of the Free the Pill movement from project director Kate Grindlay Kelly, an update from HRA Pharma on the rollout of the Actual Use Trial research required by the FDA for an OTC switch application, and an interactive workshop with ConwayStrategic on how to create strong messages in support of OCs OTC by using an array of tools and narrative elements. We heard from state advocates about the unique ways in which they are advocating for increased contraceptive access in their states, and the value of partnership across sectors.

We also opened a discussion about the working group exploring an OTC switch for a combined oral contraceptive (COC) birth control pill in addition to our work to move a progestin-only pill (POP) OTC. Attendees were overwhelmingly in support of exploring this body of work and shared key research and implementation questions for consideration as we continue to explore an OTC COC. If you weren't able to participate in this conversation, we'd love to hear your thoughts in this [short survey](#).

Finally, meeting attendees engaged in action planning and wrote three ways they want to help Free the Pill in 2020 on a postcard that will be mailed to them in January.

This year, we had 13 young people (defined as people aged 25 and under) join us for the meeting, sharing their voices and opinions throughout the day on what is important to them, including the use of inclusive language in campaign materials, being mindful of people's diverse backgrounds, and, of course, inclusion of young people in the conversation about OCs OTC.





[See our "Best Of" annual meeting photo album](#)

World Contraception Day recap

Free the Pill brand ambassadors from working group members Advocates for Youth, National Women's Health Network, and Reproaction kicked off our on-the-ground World Contraception Day activities on September 26 by handing out Free the Pill swag and information to Hill staffers and other passersby.



We also held a briefing on the Hill, "Over-the-counter contraceptive coverage in the US: State and federal policy solutions," co-sponsored by Senator Patty Murray (D-WA) and Congresswoman Ayanna Pressley (D-MA). Working group members Kelly Blanchard (president of Ibis Reproductive Health), Cherisse Scott (founder/CEO of SisterReach),

Gretchen Borchelt (vice president for reproductive rights and health at the National Women's Law Center), and Kim Clark (senior attorney for Legal Voice) highlighted the legal frameworks we need to expand contraceptive coverage in the United States and the ways we can work together to advance contraceptive access.

Following the briefing, more than 40 working group members conducted educational visits with legislators on the importance of insurance coverage for all FDA-approved contraception, including future OTC birth control pills.

In addition to our activities in DC, we engaged in a digital day of action for World Contraception Day by hosting a Tweetstorm and encouraging working group members, legislators, and the public to increase awareness of Free the Pill by sharing our messages and graphics on their social platforms throughout the day.

And finally, we debuted "What Birth Control Means to Me," a video co-produced with working group member Advocates for Youth highlighting the voices of young people on access to birth control and the impact an OTC pill could have for them. Watch it [here](#)!





[See our "Best Of" World Contraception Day photo album](#)

ACOG Committee Opinion expands stance on OTC hormonal contraceptives

Just days before our working group came together in Washington, DC, the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) [updated its 2012 committee opinion](#) to fully endorse all hormonal contraceptives being OTC. The new recommendations emphasize that the pill, patch, ring, and shot should be accessible over the counter to people of all ages and covered by insurance. We are pleased to see ACOG expanding their support for OTC access to all hormonal methods of contraception, and especially acknowledging the importance of OTC access without an age restriction.

Recent media coverage of ACOG's statement on OTC access to hormonal contraception include:

- *Des Moines Register*: [FDA should finally make birth control available over the counter, with no age restrictions](#)
- *NBC News*: [All hormonal birth control should be available over the counter, OB-GYN group says](#)
- *The Philadelphia Inquirer*: [Birth control products shouldn't require a prescription, more doctors and officials say](#)
- *Shape*: [New recommendations say *all* hormonal birth control should be available over-the-counter](#)

Assessing the impact of OTC oral contraceptives on low-income women webinar

We invite you to join us for a webinar, "Assessing the impact of over-the-counter oral contraceptives on low-income women living in rural Iowa," featuring working group member Tara Shochet, senior program associate at [Gynuity Health Projects](#). Tara will present her research analyzing the distance women in rural counties must travel to the nearest clinic and pharmacy as well as results from a survey of rural women of reproductive age on access to contraception and attitudes regarding OTC access to OCs. **The webinar will take place Tuesday, October 22 from 1-2pm ET. [Register here!](#)**

Media highlights

Britt Wahlin, vice president for development and public affairs at Ibis Reproductive Health and working group steering committee member, spoke with [Healthline](#) about the regulatory process for an Rx-to-OTC switch and why approval from the FDA alone is not enough to increase access to the pill.

"Birth control pills are some of the best-studied medicines on the market today, enjoy long-standing support from medical and public health experts, and decades of research and experience show they are safe for over-the-counter use."

In [The Hill](#), Kate Grindlay Kelly, Free the Pill project director at Ibis Reproductive Health, shared why our work to ensure any over-the-counter birth control is affordable, covered by insurance, and available to people of all ages is so critical to reproductive justice and public health.

"Making an OTC pill available to people of all ages with all forms of insurance--while ensuring affordability for those without insurance coverage--would circumvent many of the accumulating barriers to access and help to address inequities in accessing birth control for those choosing the pill."

In celebration of World Contraception Day, Rebecca Thimmesch, project associate at Advocates for Youth and working group member, wrote an op-ed for [Ms. Magazine](#) about dreaming big for improved contraceptive access for young people.

"But for over-the-counter contraception to fulfill its revolutionary promise, it has to be available without age restriction. While some may argue young people can't be trusted with their own medical decisions, I know young people are not only capable of taking care of themselves, they already are."

Teresa Kopp at the David and Lucille Packard Foundation, which funds Free the Pill, shared why she's so excited to be part of the effort to free the pill in the United States on the [Foundation's blog](#).

"One thing I know for sure is that I wouldn't be where I am right now without birth control pills. And yet, I remember those stressful days when, one day before my pill ran out, I begged for a doctor's appointment in hopes that the doctor would send me home with a free sample pack to get me by while I filled my prescription."

Quick call to action

Young people face some of the greatest obstacles in accessing birth control. We need birth control options that work for everyone!

Click to Tweet:

By expanding access to contraception, we're giving all people the tools they need to take care of their health. @FreeThePill and @AdvocatesTweets highlight the voices of young people on access to birth control and why it's time to #FreeThePill

WHAT BIRTH CONTROL MEANS TO ME

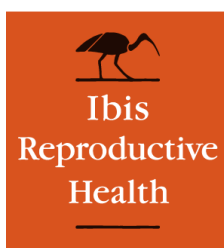
Signing onto the statement of purpose

Has your organization signed onto our [statement of purpose](#)? Does your organization send a newsletter where you could share information about our work and Free the Pill? Please help us demonstrate the wide support that exists for making OCs available OTC in the United States. [Email Mary](#) to let her know!

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

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