



Oral Contraceptives Over-the-Counter Working Group Updates

December 22, 2021

Dear Working Group member,

I hope that you are taking care. As we close out 2021 and look ahead to the new year, our team is reflecting on the progress made, obstacles overcome, and learnings gained over the past twelve months. We see key opportunities to work in partnership with coalition members to prepare for a momentous 2022, in which we anticipate the submission of an application to the FDA for a Rx-to-OTC switch for an oral contraceptive in the United States. We wouldn't have gotten this far without a compelling need for an OTC product that is safe, accessible, and truly affordable, and all of your dedicated work and support to bring us closer to that reality.

Though this is an exciting moment for the coalition and Free the Pill campaign, we must acknowledge and address that this is also a time of great challenge for the broader reproductive health, rights, and justice movement. We are deeply concerned about what is at stake for abortion access and rights in the coming year and will continue to work in solidarity with our colleagues to preserve people's rights to bodily autonomy and self-determination. Everyone should have access to the full range of reproductive health care—including contraception and abortion—no matter who they are or where they live.

With gratitude,

Victoria Nichols

Victoria Nichols
Free the Pill Project Director
Ibis Reproductive Health

Reflecting on the year's accomplishments and activities

As 2021 comes to a close, Free the Pill team members have shared their end-of-year reflections and accomplishments, and what they are looking forward to in the new year.

In 2021 we continued to make the most of virtual engagements. It was the first time we tried out a larger briefing before the annual meeting—which was a great way to get lots more folks engaged and up to date on our work to make a pill available OTC. We heard at the annual meeting that two companies are in discussion with the FDA and we hope to have a submission for an OTC switch in 2022. It is a very exciting time, and despite so many current challenges, I am looking forward to all the great advocacy, testimony, data, engagement, social media, partnership, research, state activities, and young people organizing to come.

– **Kelly Blanchard, President**

This year created an opportunity for us to rethink our campaign structure and the skills and experience needed in our next Free the Pill leader to take this work to the finish line in the next two years. I am thrilled to have Victoria Nichols at the helm of the campaign, to have engaged Civitas Public Affairs to develop a robust policy strategy in collaboration with our partners so we can ensure we have OTC coverage policies in place by the time of an FDA decision, and to have created a brain trust of our key advisors through the formation of a campaign cabinet.

– **Britt Wahlin, Vice President of Development and Public Affairs**

One of the things that stands out to me about our campaign's work in 2021 is the launch of the **Free the Pill Virtual Store** by our partner Advocates for Youth for our third-annual Free the Pill Day! This virtual experience not only presents a beautiful illustration of what it could look like when birth control pills are readily accessible on the shelf of your local corner store but also encourages visitors to take action by **signing a petition** to the Biden administration to “follow the science” and ensure young people have access to any future OTC birth control pill.

– **Steph Synoracki, Associate Communications Director**

Although there have been many exciting accomplishments on the research team this year, I am most proud of the successful launch of data collection for our study

“Exploring the contraceptive needs, desires, preferences, and experiences of Black, Indigenous, Asian American and Pacific Islander, and Latina/Latinx people in the United States.” Despite facing various challenges, it is exciting to be collecting data that centers the diverse and rich perspectives of these communities.

– **Katie Key, Senior Research Manager**

This year I am most proud of our successful Free the Pill Hill Education Day where we virtually convened 35 coalition partners and met with 52 House and Senate offices to educate on the importance of OTC OCs that are affordable, covered by insurance and accessible to all ages. This year was also special due to the expansion of the Free the Pill team and the working group in the form of new team members, trusted partners, and five new organizations that signed on to our [statement of purpose](#). In 2022, the OTC OTC movement will be placed at the intersection of science, policy, and advocacy, and I am looking forward to the opportunities that will arise from a potential FDA submission.

– **Jess Sanchez, Free the Pill Project Coordinator**

It has been an honor to step into this new role and I have learned so much from my colleagues on the Free the Pill team and in the coalition in my first six months. I am inspired by the history of this movement and the long-term vision of its leaders who have been advancing this work over the past 17 years. I am powered by our reproductive justice partners who hold us accountable to inclusion, equity, and [reckoning with the injustices of history](#). I am energized by our youth partners who have enlightened us with new and creative ways of thinking about access, organizing, and advocacy. I look forward to continuing to work in partnership with our 110+ member coalition to achieve our shared goal of an OTC birth control pill that is affordable, covered by insurance, and accessible to all ages.

– **Victoria Nichols, Free the Pill Project Director**

#FreeThePill Youth Council update



The #FreeThePill Youth Council is celebrating another year of elevating youth voices in working towards OCs OTC. Some highlights from the council this year include debuting the first ever [Free the Pill Virtual Store](#) and celebrating World Contraception Day!

The council is in the process of collecting stories from folks who have struggled to access the birth control pill in their communities, and will be continuing this work into the spring. We hope that these stories will help tell policymakers just how important bringing OCs over the counter is to young people all over the country. Please share [this story collection form](#) with your networks—all ages are welcome to share their stories!

Policy update

The Free the Pill Campaign is continuing work at the federal level to educate policymakers on the importance of an over-the-counter birth control pill option in the United States. Updates on this work include:

- As the Senate moves through FDA Commissioner confirmation hearings for Dr. Robert Califf, the Biden Administration's nominee, Free the Pill is continuing to work with other reproductive health advocates to educate key Senators on the need, importance, and safety of an OTC birth control pill. We expect that the next FDA commissioner will oversee the review and decision-making for an OTC switch application, and it is critical that the new Commissioner prioritize science and data in all decision-making. The full Senate vote will take place in early 2022.
- Free the Pill and coalition member, Contraceptive Access Initiative (CAI), had a meeting with members of the Congressional Pro-Choice Caucus about next steps for an OTC switch in the coming year. The Members are eager to be supportive champions on our issue and we are looking forward to continuing to work with them.

Media highlights

In *Ms. Magazine*, Raegan McDonald-Mosley, CEO of Power to Decide and working group steering committee member, highlights the importance of reproductive

autonomy in choosing a birth control method and the barriers currently threatening that autonomy.

Prior to a new FDA commissioner being nominated, Rep. Carolyn Maloney (D-NY) wrote for [The Hill](#) emphasizing the urgent need for this role to ensure science and equity are prioritized in the agency's decisions.

A quick call to action

RT if you agree 🙌🙌🙌: Birth control pills should be available over the counter, fully covered by insurance, priced affordably, AND available to people of all ages. #FreeThePill

[Click to Tweet](#)

Resources and more

Statement on racial justice

The OCs OTC Working Group Steering Committee is **committed to fighting racial injustice**. Join us in this commitment and calling out systemic racism and inequities in sexual and reproductive health.

[Sign On](#)

State of the movement

Watch our recent State of the Movement briefing to hear from key leaders in our coalition about the history of the movement to bring OCs OTC, where we are now, and how you can play a role to #FreeThePill.

Statement of purpose

Our coalition is more than 100 members strong and growing! Join our movement to bring birth control pills OTC that are affordable, covered by insurance, and accessible to all ages by signing our **statement of purpose**.

[Sign On](#)

WPSI survey

The **Women's Preventive Services Initiative** is requesting input from all who engage in women's preventive services to gauge the reach of their recommendations and resource needs. Take their 3-minute survey to help

shape the landscape of preventive services, including contraception.

[Watch Now](#)

[Take the Survey](#)

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 easier access to safe, effective, and affordable contraceptives, especially for those who currently face the greatest barriers, and support making birth control pills available over the counter. **Free the Pill** is the public-facing education campaign for the working group.

The working group is coordinated by **Ibis Reproductive Health**.

[Email Us](#)



OCs OTC Working Group | 2067 Massachusetts Ave, Suite 320, Cambridge, MA 02140

[Unsubscribe {recipient's email}](#)

[Update Profile](#) | [Constant Contact Data Notice](#)

Sent by vnichols@ibisreproductivehealth.org