

## HEALTH CARE AND THE HIGH COST OF BIRTH CONTROL

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This year marks the 50th anniversary of the approval of the birth control pill. Yet for millions of women in this country, the price is just too high, making birth control simply out of reach.

Fortunately, a provision in the new health care law may allow all FDA-approved prescription contraception to be fully covered by new health plans. Simply put, that means that women may not need to find cash co-pays or out-of-pocket payments for prescription birth control.

Under the new health care law, health insurance plans will be required to fully cover women's preventive health care services without requiring any co-pays. Over the next year, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services will decide which benefits will be covered at no cost for women.

We at Planned Parenthood, including our physicians, nurses and health professionals who see patients every day, and leading medical organizations such as the American Congress of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, believe that prescription birth control should be

covered with no co-pays, so that more women can afford the method of birth control that works best for them.

This potential change in policy is so simple but so far-reaching. If birth control were made available at no cost, virtually all women of childbearing age in this country would benefit significantly. Women would be able to more consistently use the birth control method that works best for them, without worrying about cost, and that would help reduce the rate of unintended pregnancies and improve the health of women and their children.

Given that most women spend three decades of their lives trying to avoid getting pregnant, it is no surprise that this policy has significant widespread support. A survey conducted by Hart Research Associates found that 71 percent of all voters were in favor of fully covering prescription birth control with no co-pays. The number is even higher among women voters, of which 81 percent supported this policy.

The support holds strong across political, religious and ethnic groups. The survey found that 77 percent of Catholic women

voters and 72 percent of Republican women voters support covering birth control with no co-pays. Even 60 percent of male voters support this policy.

Most importantly, the survey revealed that fully covering birth control is absolutely necessary. About one-third of American women voters have struggled with the cost of prescription birth control at some point in their lives and, as a result, have used birth control inconsistently. That number rises dramatically among younger women, with more than half mentioning a time when they could not afford to use birth control consistently.

This is not surprising, given that out-of-pocket costs for birth control can be very expensive, especially for many young women and women with low incomes. Insurance co-payments for birth control pills typically range between \$15 and \$50 per month, and for other methods, such as IUDs, co-pays and other out-of-pocket expenses can reach into the hundreds of dollars. The average American woman will spend approximately five years pregnant, postpartum or trying to have children, but 30 years trying to

prevent pregnancy. That can add up to thousands of dollars spent on prescription birth control.

By eliminating this cost barrier and providing prescription birth control with no co-pays or out-of-pocket costs, women will have access to a full range of reliable, safe and effective birth control methods, thereby helping them plan their families and reduce unintended pregnancies.

In the U.S., half of all pregnancies are unintended. If we are serious about reducing the unacceptably high rate of unintended pregnancies, we need to get at the root cause and take practical steps to increase access to affordable birth control. The simple fact is that making contraception affordable reduces the number of unintended pregnancies. That's why Planned Parenthood and its thousands of health professionals support fully covering prescription birth control with no co-pays, and we know from the 3 million patients Planned Parenthood health centers see each year that this change would dramatically improve the lives of women.

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