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R SHEET ON PHARMACY ACCESS TO CONTRACEPTION IN SOUTH CAROLINA

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BACKGROUND

In the last several years, 10 states and the District of Columbia have enacted pharmacy access bills, which allow pharmacists to prescribe hormonal contraception directly to women. These efforts expand the scope of practice for pharmacists and increase birth control access—especially for women who may not have a regular physician or cannot afford one.

In South Carolina, half of all pregnancies are unintended. The state also has a low ratio of active doctors to total state population, ranking 36th in the country. Furthermore, women's healthcare specialists are scarce in South Carolina; almost 30 percent of counties do not have a single OB-GYN.

Pharmacists are capable of providing the blood pressure check and medical history questionnaire required for obtaining a birth control prescription—especially given their expertise in medicines, including hormonal birth control. Allowing pharmacists to prescribe hormonal birth control would therefore help to alleviate the side effects of the healthcare shortage in South Carolina without any additional risks. Such a paradigm also could save a considerable amount of money.

Unintended pregnancies burden taxpayers. In 2010, the medical expenses associated with 78 percent of unintended pregnancies in South Carolina were publicly funded—resulting in a taxpayer burden of over \$400 million.

Many within the medical community have endorsed the pharmacy access model. In fact, the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) believes that hormonal contraception like birth control pills should be available over-the-counter.

Nevertheless, current South Carolina regulations impede a pharmacist's ability to perform these examinations, with no credible rationale for doing so.

SUMMARY

- Many women have limited access to contraception.
- Half of all pregnancies in South Carolina are unintended.
- Taxpayers spent over \$400 million to cover the healthcare costs associated with South Carolina's unintended pregnancies in 2010.
- Adopting a pharmacy access model would safely provide women increased access to family planning options.

CURRENT DEBATE

While over-the-counter access to birth control would require federal action, states can reduce barriers to obtaining hormonal contraceptives. In fact, since 2015, states as politically disparate as Tennessee and Oregon have begun to allow pharmacists to prescribe hormonal contraception, and understandably so.

Pharmacy access is crucial for a few reasons. For starters, it allows women to have an increased number of contraception providers. Given the shortage of doctors faced by many states, including South Carolina, pharmacists are often the most accessible medical professionals for people who live in remote areas.

Further, the pharmacy access model has already proven itself beneficial. It has the potential to reduce unplanned pregnancies and thereby curtail the taxpayer burden associated with them. This can be done without negative side effects, because hormonal contraception is a safe, time-tested and effective method of avoiding unwanted pregnancies.

ACTION ITEMS

Currently, South Carolina has the opportunity to pass legislation introduced by Sen. Tom Davis (R-Beaufort) and Rep. Todd Rutherford (D-Columbia) in the Senate and House, respectively, that would put a pharmacy access model in motion, and it is easy to see why South Carolina should consider it.

The pharmacy access model would alleviate South Carolina's healthcare shortage in a perfectly safe manner. Allowing pharmacists who are medication experts to consult with patients and prescribe hormonal contraception would mean fewer unintended pregnancies, a lower taxpayer burden and increased freedom for women seeking family planning services.

CONTACT US

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