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## R SHEET ON PHARMACY ACCESS TO CONTRACEPTION IN IOWA

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### BACKGROUND

In the last several years, 10 states and the District of Columbia have passed pharmacy access bills, which allow pharmacists to prescribe hormonal contraception to women. These efforts expand the scope of practice for pharmacists and increase access to birth control for women—especially those who may not have a regular physician or find that an appointment is too costly. Such advances are critical to the prevention of unintended pregnancies.

In 2010, the latest year for which data is available, 43 percent of pregnancies in Iowa were unintended. And, they come at a high cost, as 61.5 percent of those were publicly funded, costing the federal and state governments over \$175 million—\$48.3 million of which was shouldered by Hawkeye State taxpayers.

Fortunately, Iowa's unintended pregnancy rate has decreased from its peak of 46 percent in 2006. However, the role of effective contraception in reducing unplanned pregnancies cannot be understated, as women are now using it more often and more effectively than in the past. Adopting a pharmacy access model in Iowa would therefore offer women increased access to effective contraception, especially in rural areas where it may be less accessible. In turn, this would help avoid unintended pregnancies and their effects.

### CURRENT DEBATE

Pharmacy access has seen little opposition in the medical community. In fact, the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) believes that no prescription should be necessary for hormonal contraception like birth control pills.

While over-the-counter access to birth control is a federal issue, states have increasingly implemented pharmacy access models with the goal of expanding consumer

### SUMMARY

- Many women have limited access to contraception.
- Over 40 percent of pregnancies in Iowa are unintended.
- Taxpayers have spent over \$175 million to cover the medical costs associated with unintended pregnancies.
- Allowing pharmacy access has no adverse fiscal impact on the Board of Pharmacy or the state.
- Iowa should consider a pharmacy access model to provide Iowans better access to contraception.

access. Since 2015, states as politically diverse as Utah and California have begun to allow pharmacists to prescribe hormonal contraception.

Pharmacy access is crucial for two reasons. First, it allows women more accessibility because an increased number of contraception providers become available. This is because pharmacies are typically much more prevalent than doctor's offices, especially in rural areas. Second, it expands the scope of practice for pharmacists who can already provide the services needed for a birth control examination. Current regulations impede pharmacists' capabilities to perform these services with no credible rationale.

Moreover, allowing pharmacists to prescribe birth control would follow a successful precedent set in other states and has the potential to reduce the taxpayer burden imposed by unintended pregnancies and abortions. This can be done without negative side effects because hormonal contraception is a safe, time-tested and effective method of avoiding unwanted pregnancy.

## ACTION ITEMS

The pharmacy access paradigm removes unnecessary regulations; provides women with more, easier-to-access healthcare options; and reduces public health expenditures.

Pharmacy access to contraception also expands the scope-of-practice for pharmacists, allowing them to perform a medical service that is well within their expertise. Encouraging pharmacists to become birth control providers, especially in rural areas, increases access to medical care in areas that typically lack providers.

For these reasons, Iowa should consider allowing pharmacists to prescribe birth control. The pharmacy access model has passed in a number of states since 2015, and it has shown great promise. It's time for Iowa to follow suit.

## CONTACT US

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