

ISSUE

The cost of hormonal therapy and intrauterine devices (IUDs) is a barrier for Albertan women to receive medically necessary care.

PURPOSE

To equitably provide free hormonal therapy and IUDs to all Albertans for their medical needs.

RECOMMENDATION

- The Government of Alberta expand current programs to ensure all Albertans (who do not have health plans) have access to free hormonal therapy and IUDs.

RATIONALE

- Hormonal therapy and IUDs are used for medical conditions, separate from family planning. They are used for:
 - dysmenorrhea (painful menses), endometriosis, heavy menses, atypical uterine bleeding, polycystic ovarian syndrome to prevent hirsutism, acne, endometrial hyperplasia (a precursor to endometrial cancer), iron deficiency anemia, ovarian cysts, adenomyosis, premenstrual dysphoric disorder, premenopausal menorrhagia (the 5-10 years prior to menopause when menses becomes heavier), vasomotor symptoms in perimenopause and prevention of endometrial hyperplasia.
 - preventing unnecessary surgical interventions such as hysterectomy, endometrial ablation, dilation and curettage.
- The current Government of Alberta programs are not sufficient to support all women facing financial barriers. Not every woman has access to free hormonal therapy and IUDs. They may not have employer health benefits, qualify for the Alberta Adult Health Benefit (AAHB) and Alberta Child Health Benefit (ACHB), or receive the same services at all Alberta Health Services (AHS) reproductive and sexual health locations.
 - Women are struggling to afford menstrual products each month. An Environics Research survey (Government of Canada, 2023) found that one in six (17%) Canadians who menstruate have personally experienced period poverty; this rises to one in four (25%) if their household earns less than \$40,000 a year.
 - The 2021 average income was \$47,600 and median income \$36,900 for women 16 years and older in Alberta (Statistics Canada, 2023).
 - Women in Alberta who are struggling to buy menstrual products are also struggling to buy hormonal therapy and IUDs.
 - The AAHB and ACHB (for children up to 18 years of age) cover prescription drugs; however, the maximum household income to apply starts at \$16,580. The income level requirements are too low for Albertans to buy hormonal therapy and IUDs. Table one lists all income level requirements.
 - Table two describes how free hormonal therapy and IUDs are not accessible for every patient who does not have a health plan at all AHS reproductive and sexual health locations.
 - The north zone does not provide any hormonal therapy or IUDs. The closest location is Edmonton. This is a travel barrier for people with low incomes. They are required to have two separate appointments and stay more than one day.



- Edmonton has only one location with not enough supplies to meet demand. They are referring patients to non-government programs with low-income requirements.
- Central zone and Calgary do not have enough supplies to meet demand. They are referring patients to non-government programs with low-income requirements.
- The south zone does have supplies; however, their demand is low. Barriers exist because the patient must go to more than one location. They must get a prescription from a physician and then receive three months of birth control. Patients can get a free IUD at the AHS location but go to another location for insertion. Demand may also be low because the services are not well known in the community.

BACKGROUND

- Menstruation typically begins around age 12 and ends at menopause, around the age of 50 (Healthwise Staff, 2022).
- 74% of Albertans support universal access to free contraception (Markus, 2023).
- 83% of Canadians approve of free perception contraception; seven in 10 feel the issue is urgent (Alberta College of Family Physicians, 2023).
- As of April 1, 2023 the Government of British Columbia became the first jurisdiction in Canada to make prescription contraception free to all residents with \$119 million in funding over three years (Pawson, 2023).
- Ontario's Health Insurance Plan covers contraception for individuals under 25, provided an individual is not covered by a private plan.
- Manitoba announced during their legislature throne speech on November 21, 2023 they are moving toward providing free contraception to their residents.
- On September 26, 2023, project EmpowHer sent a petition with almost 13,000 signatures supporting free contraception to Health Canada (Project EmpowHer, 2023).
- In the United States, there are current programs where daily oral contraception medications are available without a prescription and pilot projects should be initiated in Canada to do the same (U.S. Food & Drug Administration, 2023).
- Indigenous women have poorer health outcomes than the general population. Driving these poor outcomes is reduced access to healthcare. Reducing these barriers to contraception for Indigenous women living both urban and rural is an important step forward (Yee J. et al, 2011).

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- The cost savings are estimated as:
 - The cost of delivering universal contraception across Canada would be \$157 million. The savings on direct medical costs of unintended pregnancies alone would be approximately \$320 million (Morgan et al., 2015).
 - One study has shown a 9:1 total cost savings in healthcare and non-healthcare savings for money invested in publicly provided contraception (Public Health England, 2018).
 - In British Columbia, free contraception had the potential to save the health system approximately \$27 million per year (the University of British Columbia, 2023).
 - The cost savings for women are significant, as much as \$10,000 over their lifetime (the University of British Columbia, 2023).

ATTACHMENTS:

Table 1: The maximum household income to apply for the Alberta Adult Health Benefit and Alberta Child Health Benefit

Family Size	Maximum Income
Single adult	\$16,580
1 adult + 1 child	\$26,023
1 adult + 2 children	\$31,010
1 adult + 3 children	\$36,325
1 adult+ 4 children	\$41,957
Couple, no children	\$23,212
Couple + 1 child	\$31,237
Couple + 2 children	\$36,634
Couple + 3 children	\$41,594
Couple + 4 children	\$46,932

Table 2: AHS Reproductive and Sexual Health Location Services as of December 7, 2023

Health Zone	Location	Virtual Care	Types of Free Contraception Available	IUD Insertion
North	Athabasca Community Health Services	Yes for counselling	Condoms and emergency contraception.	No
North	Barrhead Community Health Services	No	Condoms and emergency contraception.	No
North	Beaverlodge Community Health Services	No	Condoms	No
North	Bonnyville Community Health Services	No	Condoms and emergency contraception.	No
North	Boyle Healthcare Centre	No	Condoms and emergency contraception	No
North	Buffalo Lake Settlement Community Health Services	No	Condoms, dental dams and emergency contraception	No
North	Calling Lake Community Health Services	No	Condoms and emergency contraception.	No
North	Cold Lake Community Health Services	No but do go to homeless shelter	Condoms and emergency contraception	No
North	Edson Healthcare Centre	No	Condoms and emergency contraception	No
North	Elizabeth Settlement Community Hall	No	Condoms and emergency contraception	No
North	Elk Point Healthcare Centre	No	Condoms and dental dams	No
North	Fairview Community Health	No	Condoms and emergency contraception	No
North	Fishing Lake Metis Settlement Community Health Services	No	Condoms and emergency contraception	No



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North	Fox Creek Healthcare Centre	No	Condoms, dental dams and emergency contraception	No
North	Fort McMurray Community Health Services	No	Condoms	No
North	George McDougall - Smoky Lake Healthcare Centre	No	Condoms and emergency contraception	No
North	Grande Prairie Provincial Building	No	Condoms	No
North	Grimshaw / Berwyn and District Community Health Centre	No	Condoms and emergency contraception	No
North	High Prairie Health Complex	No	Condoms and emergency contraception. Sometimes samples of birth control pill for free	Yes but not free
North	Hinton Community Health Services	No	Condoms and dental dams	No
North	Kikino Community Health Services	No	Condoms, dental dams and emergency contraception	No
North	Lac La Biche Provincial Building	No	Condoms, dental dams and emergency contraception	No
North	Manning Community Health Centre	No	Condoms and emergency contraception	No
North	Mayerthorpe Healthcare Centre	No	Condoms, dental dams and emergency contraception	No
North	Onoway Community Health Services	No	Condoms and emergency contraception	No
North	Peace River Community Health Centre	No	Condoms and emergency contraception	No
North	Redwater Health Centre	No	Condoms and emergency contraception	No
North	Seton - Jasper Healthcare Centre	No	Condoms and emergency contraception	No
North	Slave Lake Healthcare Centre	No	Condoms	No
North	St. Paul Community Health Services	No	Condoms, dental dams and emergency contraception	No
North	Swan Hills Healthcare Centre	No	Condoms and emergency contraception.	No
North	Thorhild Community Health Services	No	Condoms and emergency contraception	No
North	Trout / Peerless Lake Health Centre	No	Condoms	No
North	Westlock Community Health Services	No	Condoms, dental dams and emergency contraception	No

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North	Whitecourt Healthcare Centre	Yes for counselling	Condoms and emergency contraception	No
EDM	Birth Control Centre	No	Limited birth control pill, patch, ring and injection, IUDs, diaphragms, emergency contraception and condoms for low-income patients. Refer patients to non-government compassionate programs with income restrictions.	Yes
Central	Sexual Health Clinic	No	Limited birth control pill, patch, injection and ring for 26 years old and under. Applications are submitted for a discounted IUD compassionate program. There is a maximum number of IUDs available and they do have more demand than what is available in some months.	Yes
Central	Ponoka Community Health Centre	No	Limited birth control pill, patch, injection and ring for 26 years old and under. Applications are submitted to have a discount for a discounted IUD compassionate program. There is a maximum number of IUDs available and they do have more demand than what is available in some months.	No
Calgary	Okotoks Health and Wellness Centre	Yes for counseling	Limited birth control pill, patch, ring and injection, IUDs, diaphragms, emergency contraception and condoms for low-income patients. Refer patients to non-government programs with income restrictions.	Yes
Calgary	Sheldon M. Chumir Health Centre	No	Limited birth control pill, patch, ring and injection, IUDs, diaphragms, emergency contraception and condoms for low-income patients. Refer patients to non-government programs with income restrictions.	Yes
Calgary	South Calgary Health Centre	No	Limited birth control pill, patch, ring and injection, IUDs, diaphragms, emergency contraception and condoms for low-income patients. Refer patients to non-government programs with income restrictions.	Yes
Calgary	Summit: Marian & Jim Sinneave Centre for Youth Resilience	No	Limited birth control pill, patch, ring and injection, IUDs, diaphragms, emergency contraception and condoms for low-income patients. Refer patients to non-government programs with income restrictions.	Yes



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Calgary	Sunridge Professional Building	No	Limited birth control pill, patch, ring and injection, IUDs, diaphragms, emergency contraception and condoms for low-income patients. Refer patients to non-government programs with income restrictions.	Yes
South	Bassano Health Centre	No	This clinic is not open for walk-ins but appointments can be made as a nurse is not on site. Birth control pill, patch, ring and injection, IUDs, emergency contraception and condoms for low-income patients. There is enough supply to meet demand. Patients indicate they do not have a health plan and are low income (with no amount restrictions) to receive it.	No
South	Brooks Health Centre	No	Birth control pill, patch, ring and injection, IUDs, emergency contraception and condoms for low-income patients. There is enough supply to meet demand. Patients indicate they do not have a health plan and are low income (with no amount restrictions) to receive it.	No
South	Lethbridge Health Unit	No	Birth control pill, patch, ring and injection, IUDs, emergency contraception and condoms for low-income patients. Patients indicate they do not have a health plan and are low income (with no amount restrictions) to receive it.	No
South	Medicine Hat Community Health Services	No	Birth control pill, patch, ring and injection, IUDs, emergency contraception and condoms for low-income patients. Patients indicate they do not have a health plan and are low income (with no amount restrictions) to receive it.	No

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