

RESEARCH

# Free contraception means big savings for health care system

According to Dr. Norman, free, accessible birth control is one of the easiest ways to reduce costs on the health care system.

American research shows that the nation's publicly-funded clinics — which provide access to free or subsidized birth control — saved the U.S. \$13.6 billion in 2010, or about \$7 for every public dollar spent.

And a study from St. Louis, Mo., conducted between 2007 and 2011 involving 10,000 young women given the option of various methods of free birth control resulted in a dramatic drop in unintended pregnancy.

The annual rate of pregnancy for participants in the study was 34 per 1,000 women, compared to a U.S. national average of 57 per 1,000.

About 75 per cent of the participants opted for long-acting IUDs, where in contrast, only about 2 per cent of the general female population in the U.S. use an IUD.

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Dr. Wendy Norman

says Norman.

"In Canada we don't have much research to guide us. This (contraceptive access) hasn't ever been a core principle within public health," she adds.

In both the U.S. and U.K., extensive research has been done on contraceptive use and access in those countries. Norman is working to amass similar data through CART's projects. Her group has been conducting surveys in B.C. to get a better idea of the rates of unintended pregnancy and prevalence of contraceptive use and some of this research will be published later this year.

They are also looking at alternative ways to offer contraceptives to make access easier for women. Currently, in B.C. and Quebec, nurses can prescribe oral contraceptives and

Dr. Norman says her group has consulted with the College of Pharmacists in B.C. about offering contraceptives over the counter without a prescription.

Pharmacists would require additional training and be asked to administer blood pressure checks and health background questionnaires to women wanting to access contraception.

On Jan. 1, Oregon became the first state in the U.S. to allow pharmacists to prescribe oral contraceptives and the patch, and California is expected to follow suit in March.

"This would provide exceptional ability for people — especially in rural areas — to access contraception," says Dr. Norman. "These drugs are very safe."

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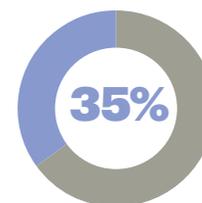
BIRTH CONTROL BY THE NUMBERS



**One in three Canadian women will have an abortion in their lifetime**

**\$13.6B**

**The money the U.S. government saved in social and health care costs in 2010 by funding family planning programs**



**The percentage of sexually active Canadian women using no contraception, or contraception inconsistently**

SOURCE: CANADIAN CONTRACEPTION CONSENSUS REPORT 2015, THE SOCIETY OF OBSTETRICIANS AND GYNAECOLOGISTS OF CANADA



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