

Improving Birth Control Access for All Alaskans

Support SB 276

We all deserve affordable and accessible birth control that works for us, regardless of our income, insurance carrier, or life circumstances. Consistent access to birth control gives people the ability to control when and if they have children, giving them more career and education opportunities, encouraging healthier pregnancies, and saving money in the state's government. **That's why 83% of voters in Alaska believe everyone who wants or needs birth control should have it.**

To ensure all people in Alaska have consistent access to birth control, insurance should cover a year's supply of birth control at a time and the full range of contraceptive methods with no out-of-pocket costs.

12 months of birth control at a time: A solution that works

Today, most birth control users are forced to refill their birth control every month, which is a burden for many people in Alaska and increases the odds of experiencing an unintended pregnancy. All people should have access to a year's supply of birth control at a time, dispensed on-site if available. This would remove barriers to consistent use and help people avoid unintended pregnancies.

- With perfect use, hormonal birth control has a failure rate of less than 5%, but for people who lack access to transportation, move frequently, or struggle to balance work and family, monthly trips to the pharmacy make perfect use challenging, especially for people in Alaska with lower incomes or who live in rural communities.
- 1 in 4 women have missed pills because they could not get the next pack in time.
- **A year's supply of birth control reduces the odds of experiencing an unintended pregnancy by 30%** and reduces the need for abortion care by 46%.
- 29 states and the District of Columbia have already enacted policies increasing the quantity of contraceptives covered at one time.
- There are many different kinds of birth control, and no one method will work for every person. Patients and their providers – not insurance carriers – should determine what method is best.
- Leading medical authorities, including the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG), agree on the benefits of comprehensive birth control access and recommend that patients have access to the full range of FDA-approved contraceptives.
- This bill will make it easier for people living in Alaska to have consistent access to necessary medications when working in remote areas like the Slope or our national and state parks, fishing out on our oceans, maintaining roads and critical infrastructure, conducting world class research out in the field, and fighting fires across the state.
- **Access to comprehensive family planning doesn't just create healthier communities; it also creates costs savings for families, the state, and insurance companies.** Expanding birth control access decreases unintended pregnancies and associated costs, saving money in the long run.

By taking steps to improve birth control access, we can reduce barriers to contraceptives, help people in Alaska plan their families and avoid unintended pregnancy, and save money for families.

Frequently Asked Questions

What if somebody wants a smaller supply of birth control?

This bill requires that insurance cover a year's supply of birth control, but it doesn't require that patients get a full year's supply if they don't want it. Patients can request a smaller supply, and providers have the flexibility they need to prescribe the amount of contraception that they and their patients feel is best. This bill simply means that insurance companies will have to cover the prescription length that patients and their providers determine is best, up to a one-year's supply.

What if people misplace their prescription?

This bill maintains the flexibility for patients to receive shorter prescriptions. If a patient is concerned about losing their prescription, their provider can write a prescription for a shorter length of time. And concerns over lost prescriptions are not unique to birth control; most insurance companies already have policies regulating what to do in the case of lost prescriptions and early refills.

What if somebody changes their mind about their birth control method after they have already received a year's supply of that method?

This bill gives patients and providers the flexibility to decide what prescription length works best for patients. This means that if a patient is unsure about what method is best for them, or if they are concerned about side effects or their ability to adhere to a method, providers can write a shorter prescription while patients determine if a method is right for them. While some people may still need to discontinue their method before a year is up for a variety of reasons, research shows that discontinuation rates are lower among women who receive a full year's supply than among women who receive a smaller supply.

What if people get a year's supply at the end of their plan year and then switch to a different insurance plan, or switch employers before their supply runs out?

Regardless of which specific insurance plan pays for it, the benefits of increased contraceptive access will provide tremendous cost-savings across the entire health care industry. There may be situations where a carrier pays for a year's supply and the enrollee switches plans before the supply is used up. However, plans will also benefit from new enrollees coming to them with an existing supply of contraceptives that they received on their previous plan. And this is not a new situation: people who receive long-acting reversible contraception (LARC, such as IUDs or implants) already take those methods with them when they switch health plans.

Why is it important to provide access to all forms of contraceptives?

Birth control methods are not one-size-fits-all: the best contraceptive method is that which meets an individual's needs, and cost or effectiveness at preventing unintended pregnancy are not the only way somebody might evaluate what would work best for them. A variety of factors may contribute to an individual's decision about what type of contraceptive to use, including side effects, cost, effectiveness at preventing pregnancy, personal comfort or discomfort with a method, and other health concerns, such as the need to address a medical condition or protecting against STIs.