

Dear
Mr. Murphy,

The Minister for Health, Stephen Donnelly T.D has asked me to thank you for your recent correspondence.

The free contraception scheme for women aged 17 -25 was launched on 14th September, 2022, and expanded to include 26 year-olds on January 1st, 2023. The scheme is currently open to women aged 17-26 who are ordinarily resident in Ireland. The scheme will be further expanded to include women aged 30 and under, by September 1st, 2023.

For eligible women, the free contraception scheme provides for:

- The cost of consultations with GPs, family planning clinics and other relevant medical professionals to discuss contraceptive options with eligible patients and to provide prescriptions for these;
- The cost of fitting and/or removal of various types of long-acting reversible contraception (LARC) plus any necessary checks, by medical professionals certified to fit/remove LARCs (e.g. intrauterine devices (IUD), systems (IUS), coils and implants);
- The cost of providing the wide range of prescription contraceptive options currently available to GMS (medical) card holders, also be available through this scheme, including contraceptive injections, implants, IUS and IUDs, the contraceptive patch and ring, and various forms of oral contraceptive pill, including emergency contraception, dispensed at a local pharmacy of choice;
- Women who have had coils, IUDs, IUSs or implants inserted under the scheme will remain eligible for the subsequent checks and free removal of any devices that were inserted before their 27th birthday, in order to ensure continuity of care.

Access to contraception, free of charge, is also enabled through the National Condom Distribution Service (NCDS), which distributes through the STI clinics, NGOs working with high-risk groups participating higher education institutions and with free home STI testing.

The free prescription contraception scheme is being introduced on a phased basis, as per recommendations, to avoid excess demand on the health care system, to pilot the likely costs of full eligibility more accurately, and to have the time to resolve any issues that arise in the course of implementation.

The initial 17 -25 year-old age-range represented the most vulnerable age cohort, those least likely to have independent means and those most at risk of crisis pregnancy and have therefore been chosen as a starting point, as recommended by the Report of the Working Group on Access to Contraception, which is available on the Department's website.

It should be noted that patients who have a GMS (medical) card and who are aged over 30 already have access to prescription contraception and LARC fittings and removals through the GMS scheme, subject only to the prescription charge of €1.50 per dispensation. Patients aged over 30 with a GP Visit card do not have to pay the cost of consultations.

I hope that the above has been of assistance.

Yours

sincerely,

Fiona Conroy

Private Secretary to the Minister for Health