November 6, 2023

Upstream USA welcomes the opportunity to submit public comments regarding the emergency amendments to regulation 105 CMR 700.000, which authorizes registered pharmacists to prescribe and dispense hormonal contraceptive patches and self-administered oral hormonal contraceptives.

Upstream is a national nonprofit that partners with healthcare organizations to expand equitable access to the full range of contraceptive methods. With support from the Executive Office of Health and Human Services, Upstream launched a multi-year initiative in Massachusetts in 2018. We have since partnered with almost 30 health centers across the state, largely federally qualified health centers, including many with onsite pharmacies.

We applaud the recent passage of the 2024 Massachusetts State Budget, which authorized pharmacists to dispense and prescribe the pill and patch methods to eligible patients, and the subsequent efforts to implement this law swiftly.

We encourage the Department of Public Health to introduce as few regulatory barriers as possible in the implementation of this law. Birth control is safe, effective, and well-tested, and pharmacists are medication experts who are qualified to prescribe these methods with few limitations. A 2021 study on birth control prescribing found that pharmacists can safely screen for medical contraindications, and are no more likely than doctors to prescribe to a patient with contraindications.[[1]](#footnote-1)

Upstream encourages the Department of Health, as well the Division of Insurance and other payers, to establish channels of payment for pharmacist birth control counseling services. Lack of payment is frequently cited as the single most significant barrier to implementing pharmacist prescribing. Pharmacists who receive payment for providing contraceptive counseling services are more likely to seek certification for, and go on to prescribe, birth control.[[2]](#footnote-2)

Upstream is eager to be a partner and resource to advance birth control access in Massachusetts via pharmacist prescribing. We provide our partners with training sessions that are accredited by the American Council on Pharmaceutical Education (ACPE), and have partnered with birth control pharmacist prescribing projects in other states to develop a referral protocol to our robust network of providers trained in patient-centered counseling. We would welcome the opportunity to partner with the Department of Health as implementation efforts continue.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sarah Legried

State Policy Manager

Upstream USA

2 Oliver Street #402

Boston, MA 02109

1. Rodriguez, Kaufman, Manibusan, Anderson, McConnell. “[Medical contraindications to combined hormonal contraceptive use among women using methods prescribed by a pharmacist](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/34116068/).” Contraception Journal, 2021. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Orris, Mauser, Bachrach, Craven. “[Implementing Pharmacist Contraceptive Prescribing: A Playbook for States and Stakeholders.](https://www.manatt.com/Manatt/media/Documents/Articles/Implementing-Pharmacist-Contraceptive-Prescribing_v3.pdf)” Manatt, 2021. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)