

Rt Hon Matt Hancock MP
Secretary of State for Health and Social Care
Department of Health and Social Care
39 Victoria Street
London SW1H 0EU

CC

Jo Churchill MP, Minister for Prevention, Public Health and Primary Care
Nadine Dorries MP, Minister for Patient Safety, Suicide Prevention and Mental Health
Andrea Duncan, Programme Manager for Sexual Health and HIV, Department of Health
Jonathon Marron, Director General for Public Health, Department of Health and Social Care

Sent via email to: mb-sofs@dhsc.gov.uk

30 March 2021

Dear Secretary of State

Re: Accountable and empowered lead for women's health on each ICS Board

We are writing as the Advisory Group on Contraception (AGC) to call for a designated accountable lead for women's health to be mandated on each Integrated Care System (ICS) Board, empowered and responsible for driving change and tangible improvements in women's health, including access to contraception.

The AGC is an expert group of leading clinicians, commissioners and advocacy groups, working together to highlight the impact of policy reforms on access to contraception. Our most recent data analysis has found a number of concerning trends affecting access to contraceptive services in England:

- Frontline services in England have experienced **20% cuts in the real terms** and **12% cuts in actual budget** for contraception since the in-year public health cuts of 2015¹
- **26% of local authorities** in England reduced the number of sites commissioned to deliver contraception in 2018/19 – up from 9% of local authorities that had reduced sites in 2015/16²
- LARC prescriptions (excluding injectables) dispensed in the community **have fallen by 5%** between 2013 and 2019³

This data was collected before the COVID-19 pandemic. We know, however, that contraceptive services have been severely affected by both reduced service capacity and a growing backlog of waiting lists, with contraception related contacts with sexual and

¹ Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, Local authority revenue expenditure and financing: outturn data from 2015 to 2016 and 2019 to 2020. Accessed here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/local-authority-revenue-expenditure-and-financing>

² AGC, Shining a light on access to contraception in England: an overview of 2019-2020 data. Accessed here: http://theagc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/AGC-2019-2020-data-deck_September-2020.pdf

³ NHS Digital, Sexual and Reproductive Health Services, England (Contraception) 2019/20. Accessed here: <https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/sexual-and-reproductive-health-services/2019-20>

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reproductive health services falling 37% from 2019 levels⁴. Whilst the latest PHE data suggests services are slowly returning to pre-pandemic levels, following an 85% reduction in GP prescribed LARC in May 2020⁵, this data does not reflect the ongoing backlog of patients that services are facing.

We believe the current policy climate presents an opportunity for change and we welcome the Government's commitment to women's health, as seen through the current consultation on the Women's Health Strategy and forthcoming work on the Sexual and Reproductive Health Strategy. In order to ensure effective and holistic women's health service, it is vital that these strategies align and work closely together. With this in mind, we have copied in the Ministers leading on the Women's Health and Sexual and Reproductive Health strategies to encourage cross-ministerial working and ensure there are no gaps in care.

We also believe that the statutory establishment of ICSs across England presents a real opportunity to break down the current silos and make the system work for women. The AGC, as a group, is therefore calling for **an accountable lead for women's health to be required on each ICS Board**, responsible for bringing together the providers and commissioners in their footprint to drive tangible improvements in women's health, including access to contraception.

We recently had a productive meeting with the Minister for Prevention, Public Health and Primary Care on the issues facing access to contraception more generally. However, if you would like to discuss the representation of women's health at the ICS level in further detail, we would warmly welcome the opportunity to arrange a virtual meeting with a delegation of our members. We will follow up with your office regarding a potential meeting, but your team can also reach us directly via AGC@incisivehealth.com.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely

The Advisory Group on Contraception

Members of the Advisory Group on Contraception are:

- Dr Amanda Britton, GP Principal, Basingstoke; Medical Director North Hampshire Alliance
- Rachael Clarke, Head of Public Affairs and Policy, British Pregnancy Advisory Service
- Dr Anne Connolly, Clinical Lead for Women's and Sexual Health, NHS Bradford and Airedale
- Su Everett, Senior Lecturer Middlesex University and Senior Nurse Practitioner in Sexual Health, Royal Free Hospital
- Baroness Gould of Potternewton
- Alison Hadley, Director, Teenage Pregnancy Knowledge Exchange
- Lisa Hallgarten, Head of Policy and Public Affairs, Brook
- Julia Hogan, Contraceptive and Sexual Health Nurse Specialist, MSI Reproductive Choices UK

⁴ NHS Digital, Sexual and Reproductive Health Services (Contraception). April-September 2020 (provisional statistics) <https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/sexual-and-reproductive-health-services/april-to-september-2020>

⁵ Public Health England, Wider Impacts of COVID-19 on Health (WICH) monitoring tool. Accessed here: <https://analytics.phe.gov.uk/apps/covid-19-indirect-effects/#>

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- Dr Asha Kasliwal, Clinical Director and Consultant in Community Gynaecology and Reproductive Health, Manchester University NHS Foundation Trust
- Dr Jayne Kavanagh, Principal Clinical Teaching Fellow at UCL Medical School specialising in sexual and reproductive health and the Medical Director of the Campaign for Contraception
- Ruth Lowbury, independent consultant specialising in sexual health and HIV
- Dr Diana Mansour, Consultant in Community Gynaecology and Reproductive Healthcare, Newcastle upon Tyne NHS Foundation Trust
- Olivia Marshall, Press and Campaigns Officer, British Pregnancy Advisory Service
- Louise McCudden, Advocacy & Public Affairs Advisor, MSI Reproductive Choices UK
- Nancy Padwick, representing the English HIV and Sexual Health Commissioners Group (EHSHCG)
- Karen Pitney, Business Development Manager, GDoc Ltd
- Deborah Shaw, Lead for Sexual Health (East Midlands), Public Health England
- Professor Jill Shawe, Professor in Women's Health, University of Plymouth
- Dr Connie Smith, Co-Chair, PHE External Advisory Group for Sexual Health, Reproductive Health and HIV
- Dr Annabel Sowemimo, Sexual and Reproductive Health doctor and Founder of Decolonising Contraception
- Harry Walker, Head of External Affairs & Standards, Faculty of Sexual and Reproductive Healthcare
- Dr Chris Wilkinson, Consultant in Sexual & Reproductive Healthcare, Central and North West London NHS Foundation Trust
- Lesley Wylde, Non-Executive Director, Primary Care Women's Health Forum

Observers to the Advisory Group on Contraception are:

- Fahima Amin, Medical Advisor for Women's Health, Organon & Co at MSD UK
- Carmela Brewer, Professional Relations Manager, Bayer
- Edison Chen, Associate Director, Organon & Co at MSD UK
- Magda Kalata, Senior Government Affairs Manager, Bayer
- Dr Sue Mann, Medical Expert for Sexual Health and Reproductive Health, Public Health England

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