

New pathways open for female reproductive health care

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Two important new avenues have opened up for women to access reproductive health care medications. Several high-profile retailers merit commendation for their contributing role. Their involvement is an

example of conscientious leadership from the business community.

One of the recently opened pathways involves [birth control pills](#). While this form of contraception has been available by prescription for decades, an over-the-counter version called Opill is expected to be available in stores and online soon in Minnesota and elsewhere.

The Star Tribune Editorial Board has previously advocated for making birth control pills available without a prescription. In 2022, the U.S. Supreme Court added to the urgency when it overturned *Roe v. Wade*. Major medical organizations—such as the American Medical Association, whose membership includes about 272,000 current and retired U.S. physicians—also have called for over-the-counter access, and with good reason.

Birth control pills have a long track record of safety and are one of the most effective forms of reversible contraception available. They're also sold over-the-counter in more than 100 countries. American women should be able to access birth control pills just as easily, without the cost of seeing a medical provider. Fortunately, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration approved Opill last summer for over-the-counter use, enabling purchase in a store or online without a doctor's visit.

Commercial availability took a bit of time to catch up, but the product should be in some stores by the end of March, with the price estimated at \$20 a month, \$49.95 for a three-month supply or \$89.99 for a six-month supply.

The FDA's decision is overdue but still welcome. While Opill will be sold online at [Opill.com](#), it's also critical for broader access that traditional retailers stock it. Buying Opill at a neighborhood store provides immediate availability vs. waiting for [mail delivery](#), which may be a deterrent to some or compromise privacy.

Putting Opill over the counter is the conscientious step to take. But it's easy to see how some retailers might fear backlash from religious or political figures aiming to restrict reproductive health care.

Two of the nation's best-known drugstore chains have laudably announced that they will sell Opill. "Opill will be available at CVS.com and through the CVS Pharmacy app in late March," Amy Thibault of CVS communications told an editorial writer.

"In early April more than 7,500 CVS Pharmacy stores will offer Opill, and for added privacy and convenience, customers will be able to choose same-day delivery or buy online and pick-up in store."

A Walgreens spokesperson said the drugstore chain will also offer Opill as it becomes commercially available because its stores are "your local communities' health and wellness destination."

Target said late Tuesday that its stores will stock Opill as well. Other retailers should follow these chains' lead. The same holds true for dispensing another important reproductive health care medication: mifepristone. It is a prescription drug taken orally to induce an abortion during the first 10 weeks of pregnancy.

In a move that is the second recently expanded avenue for reproductive health care, CVS and Walgreens announced that they have completed a new FDA [certification process](#) to dispense mifepristone on a phased-in basis in locations where it is legally permissible. Before the certification process, prescriptions for this safe medication generally had to be filled at clinics or through the mail. Not every clinic stocked it.

The certification is again welcome leadership and an important step in safeguarding reproductive health care access, particularly with the U.S. Supreme Court taking up a case soon involving mifepristone. That ruling

could result in limits on filling prescriptions by mail.

Lawmakers in Minnesota and elsewhere have work ahead of them as well in protecting [reproductive health care](#). Opill's cost, for example, could be a deterrent, with insurance not covering it because of its over-the-counter status. The medication's availability is a public health milestone that should inspire bipartisan support, with broad use of Opill hopefully leading to fewer abortions. Opill will have patient assistance programs available, but other state-level measures merit consideration, such as requiring insurers to cover its cost.

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