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**CALL FOR TENDER**

**Research on Marginalised Women’s Experiences of the Free Contraception Scheme**

**August 2024**

**Aim**

The aim of this research project is to investigate women’s awareness and experiences of the Free Contraception Scheme to date, in addition to exploring women’s attitudes towards contraception more broadly. The research will have a particular focus on marginalised women, including Traveller women, Roma women, disabled women, migrant women, LGBTQIA+ individuals, women living in rural areas, women who are socioeconomically disadvantaged, and women who have experienced homelessness, addiction, or are survivors of gender-based violence.

The Women’s Health Action Plan 2022-2023 recognised that marginalised women experience the most acute challenges when engaging with the health care system. The Plan made specific commitments to rethinking how marginalised women can access healthcare in ways that are appropriate and convenient to them.

The Free Contraception Scheme, Action 4A of the Women’s Health Action Plan 2022-2023, initially allowed women aged 17-25 years to access a range of free contraceptives. The Scheme has since been expanded under the new Women’s Health Action Plan 2024-2025 Phase 2: An Evolution in Women’s Health and now serves women aged 17-35 years of age. This was warmly welcomed by the Women’s Health Taskforce of which NWC is a valued member.

By focusing our engagement on marginalised women, this research will capture a diverse sample of women’s experiences accessing the Scheme, providing insights into any barriers and participants’ attitudes towards the Scheme and the use of contraceptives.

The final report will include recommendations, aimed at supporting the Department of Health (DoH) to improve the Scheme for all women.

**Background**

Listening is a key tenet of the Women’s Health Taskforce, and this research will provide an opportunity for women’s voices and in particular marginalised women’s voices to be heard in relation to their experiences accessing the Free Contraception Scheme.

The Department of Health under its commitment to progressing women’s health and in delivering the Free Contraception Scheme has partnered with NWC to carry out this research project. This project will benefit from NWC’s more than 50 years of experience applying a gender lens to public policy. With more than 190 member organisations, NWC will be able to support the researcher to gain access to marginalised groups of women. Our diverse membership includes groups and organisations representing migrant women, Traveller & Roma women, survivors of gender-based violence, disabled women, members of the LGBTIQA+ community, and front-line services working directly with women experiencing homelessness and addiction.

**The Free Contraception Scheme**

The Free Contraception Scheme has been gradually expanded since its introduction in September 2022. Initially introduced for women aged 17-25 years, it was expanded to include 26-30-year-old women in 2023. As of July 2024, the scheme now includes women aged 32-35 years inclusive.

The Scheme covers the cost of consultations with GPs, family planning, student health and primary care centres, and prescriptions for the wide range of contraceptive options available on the HSE Reimbursement List. These options include long-acting reversible contraception (LARCs). LARCs include injections, implants, and hormonal and intra-uterine devices and systems. The scheme also includes emergency contraception in addition to the oral contraceptive pill, patch, and ring. The Scheme is open to women, and transgender or non-binary individuals, who are ordinarily resident in Ireland and for whom prescription contraception is deemed suitable by their doctors.

Almost 2,400 GPs and 2,050 pharmacies are providing services under the Scheme, with more than 189,000 women accessing the service in 2023.[[1]](#footnote-2)

**Methodology**

This research will follow a mixed-method approach, including:

* A desk-based review of relevant national and international literature, policies and practices
* A survey aimed at women aged 18-35 years on their experiences of the Free Contraception Scheme to date. While the Scheme is available to 17-year-olds, this project will not be engaging minors due to ethical considerations
* Semi-structured focus groups with marginalised groups of women (e.g. disabled women, Traveller and Roma women, migrant women, women experiencing homelessness and addiction, etc.)
* There may also be opportunities for direct engagement with key stakeholders – e.g. Department of Health, HSE, Irish Family Planning Association (IFPA), Irish Pharmacy Union (IPU), and the Union of Students in Ireland (USI)

**Profile of Researcher**

Experienced qualitative researcher with a background in social science, social policy, health promotion or public health.

## **The Researcher will be Responsible for:**

* Reviewing relevant literature, policies and practices pertaining to Free Contraception Schemes in Ireland and other relevant jurisdictions
* Developing appropriate research questions to investigate women’s **awareness of** the Free Contraception Scheme, to investigate **their experiences** of the Scheme, and their **attitudes towards** contraception more broadly
* Submitting for ethical approval and ensuring the research project follows appropriate ethical guidelines
* Developing an appropriate survey and interview guide for focus groups
* Conducting focus groups to engage directly with marginalised women on their experiences of the Free Contraception Scheme (NWC will assist with recruitment of all participants).
* Preparing a written report, including a literature review, data analysis, and recommendations
* Working alongside NWC’s health team. This will include liaising with them at key points in the project and ensuring they are consulted at all stages of the design and implementation of the research. Monthly review meetings will be scheduled to support this communication
* Presenting updates to the Project Advisory Group (a minimum of 3 meetings for the duration of the research)[[2]](#footnote-3)
* Presenting the findings at a report launch event when the research has concluded

## **Output**

An accessible report (approx. 45 pages) which is written in clear, plain, and succinct language for a lay audience, complete with an executive summary. The editing and proofing work is the responsibility of the researcher, and the final report must be print ready.

## **Management**

The project will be managed by Doireann Crosson, NWC’s Women’s Health Coordinator. NWC will establish a Project Advisory Group to support this research and provide input at different stages. The researcher will participate in monthly review meetings with the NWC’s health team and present updates to the project advisory group.

**Budget and Time Frame**

The budget for this research is €27,000 inclusive of VAT and all other expenses. This research will officially begin in October and conclude by July 2025.

# **TENDERING PROCESS**

# **Tender requirements**

To apply, a Tender Proposal should be emailed to Doireann Crosson: doireannc@nwci.ie and marked “Tender for Contraception Research Project” **by 5pm on Friday, 06/09/2024.** All information provided to NWC in response to this request will be treated in strict confidence.

Tender proposals should include the following:

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| **Person/organisation details** | * The name and address of the tenderer * The organisation associated with the tenderer (if relevant) * The tenderer’s CV and the CVs of any personnel expected to support with this project. CVs should include all relevant experience and have two examples of relevant research projects with a separate contactable referee for each |
| **Qualification, Relevant Experience & Track Record** | * An outline of skills, qualifications, and experience in this area * A demonstrated track record in qualitative research; experience on a similar research project and/or of working with marginalised groups will be an advantage * Experience of adhering to research ethics – including the responsibilities of the researcher with respect to data protection |
| **Proposed Methodology & Understanding of the Brief** | * A demonstrated understanding of the research aims and the researcher’s responsibilities for this project * The proposed methodology for delivering the best results, in line with the conditions of this tender |
| **Cost, Timeframe, & Value for Money** | * Confirmation of ability to meet the timeframe of the project, including a provisional outline of a workplan * A demonstrated proficiency in delivering results, including with respect to communicating with project stakeholders and ensuring research meets expected deadlines and milestones * An outline of the costs:   + Set out any issues which may impact on the cost   + All costs must be inclusive of VAT and expenses   + Demonstrate value for money   + Breakdown of costs showing the number of days required to complete the task, the number of days for each person, if there is more than one person involved   + The fee quoted should include travel and subsistence costs |

**Timeframe**

* Tenders to be submitted to Doireann Crosson: doireannc@nwci.ie and marked “Tender for Contraception Research Project” **by 5pm on Friday, 06/09/2024.**
* Please note, potential researchers will be interviewed and may be asked to prepare a presentation. We expect that the successful applicant will be informed by 11/10/2024.
* October – December 2024:
  + Desk-based research
  + Meetings with NWC health team and Project Advisory Group
  + Development of survey and interview guide for future focus groups
  + Focus group schedule confirmed for Q1 2025 with support from NWC
  + Submit ethnical approval to relevant university ethics committee or external ethics board (e.g. RCPI)
* January – March 2025:
  + Survey disseminated by NWC
  + Focus groups take place
  + Analysis of survey and focus group data
* April – June 2025:
  + Potential for direct engagement with other key stakeholders – e.g. HSE, DoH, IPU, IFPA, USI, etc.
  + Analysis and write-up continues
  + The first draft is due in early May. This will be reviewed by Project Advisory Group, with a final sign off from DoH and NWC
  + Report should be finalised by the end of June 2025
* July 2025:
  + Presentation at report launch organised by NWC and DoH

# **Project Budget**

The total budget for the Project is **€27,000 inclusive** of VAT and all expenses.

**Conditions of Tender**

1. Tenders that are delivered late will not be considered.
2. NWC reserves the right not to award a contract if no proposal is suitable.
3. NWC requires that tenderers treat all information provided pursuant to this Invitation to Tender in strict confidence.
4. Information supplied by tenderers will be treated as contractually binding. However, NWC reserves the right to seek clarification on any such information.
5. All material gathered and all outputs arising out of the proposed contract will remain the property of NWC and DoH. Tenderers must agree to this condition.
6. All information and knowledge acquired by the successful tenderer during this project must be handled responsibly, ensuring compliance with GDPR standards and best practices.
7. Contractors must retain records of tax reference numbers for any subcontractors, whose payments exceed €5,000 including VAT.
8. Any conflicts of interest involving a contractor (or contractors in the event of a group or consortium bid) must be fully disclosed to NWC, particularly where there is a conflict of interest in relation to any recommendations or proposals put forward by the tenderer.
9. NWC will not be liable for any costs incurred in the preparation of the tender.
10. Payment for all services covered by this Invitation to Tender will be on foot of appropriate invoices. Invoicing arrangements will be agreed with the successful supplier(s), subject to the terms of the Prompt Payment of Accounts Act (27 of 1997).
11. Payment of all services covered by this invitation to Tender will be based on the agreed contract price, completion of agreed stages of the work plan and upon the submission of the appropriate invoices.
12. NWC and DoH will have sign-off and editing rights to the final version of the research report ahead of publication. NWC and DoH will ensure the final report and any subsequent use of the research materials gives due credit to the successful tenderer.
13. NWC and DoH will own the completed research and will retain copyright.

**Evaluation of Tenders**

Tenders will be evaluated initially with reference to the following qualification criteria:

* Qualification, Relevant Experience, and Track Record – 30%
* Understanding of the Brief and Proposed Methodology – 50%
* Cost of Successful Project Delivery, Timeframe, and Value for Money – 20%

Only those tenders deemed to have sufficiently met the threshold for the above qualification criteria will be eligible for inclusion in the award process. Tenderers are advised that they may be required to make a formal presentation of their proposal.

1. [Department of Health Press Release, 3rd June 18th](https://www.gov.ie/en/press-release/8dbd2-minister-for-health-announces-that-free-contraception-will-be-extended-to-women-aged-32-35-from-1-july-2024/#:~:text=The%20Minister%20for%20Health%20Stephen,be%20covered%20under%20the%20scheme.) [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Project Advisory Group will be made up approximately 8 members, including organisations representing marginalised groups of women, academia, and HSE/DoH [↑](#footnote-ref-3)