

Mar 2, 2026

OTC Collaborative March meeting

Attendance:

Aliyah Horton
Cynthia Baur
Delia Angulo Chen
Sabrina Bassett
Kelly Cleland
Penny Jacobs
Jakeya Johnson
Becca Lane
Amanda Li
Neil McGarvey
Victoria Nichols
Samantha Ritter
Joseph Winn

Guests: Robyn Elliott

Staff: Ariana, Brett, Camille, Genesis

Summary

Brett Jordan and Cynthia E Baur welcomed attendees to the collaborative's meeting, where participants discussed key topics for the 2026 work, focusing on addressing barriers to over-the-counter (OTC) birth control access in Maryland, identifying solutions for operationalizing coverage at the point of sale, and increasing consumer awareness. Ariana Kelly

provided an update on the health committee briefing regarding the collaborative's work, which included receiving the interim report and committee members expressing concern about OTC contraception availability for non-college populations and retail coverage. A small working group, including Sabrina Bassett and Joe Winn, was proposed to address the NPI billing issue, while another was suggested to focus on public education and marketing, leveraging existing resources shared by Delia Angulo Chen, and the group also reviewed potential final recommendations, including expanding coverage to condoms and devices.

Details

- **Meeting Welcome and Agenda Overview:** Brett Jordan and Cynthia Baur welcomed attendees to the March meeting of the collaborative. Cynthia E Baur provided an overview of the agenda, explaining that the focus has shifted from the first set of draft recommendations to more expansive work toward final recommendations at the end of the year. Today's agenda included a check-in poll, brief presentations, an open brainstorming session, and a concluding poll and discussion led by Aliyah Horton.
- **Identifying Key Topics for the 2026 Work:** Aliyah Horton initiated the first poll, asking participants to share the topics or actions they were most excited to discuss for the collaborative's work, emphasizing that the forward steps should be informed by the group. Cynthia Baur framed the core focus as addressing barriers to and making it easier for people to access over-the-counter (OTC) birth control in Maryland this year. Topics identified through the poll included identifying solutions for operationalizing coverage at the point of sale, ensuring easy claims processing for pharmacists, providing NPI guidance, and increasing consumer awareness through communications and signage.
- **Focus Areas for Implementation and Legislative Change:** Participants offered several key focus areas, including working with pharmacies to implement signage, determining how the Maryland Health Benefit Exchange (MHBE) can support OTC coverage access, and ensuring OTC contraception coverage is available at the point of sale rather than solely through reimbursement. The primary themes emerging from the poll were pharmacy access, general

point-of-care access, and effective communications/marketing to the community, emphasizing the need for people with Medicaid to have the same prescription-free access. There was also a suggestion to examine the coverage of condoms and devices to align with broader comprehensive care.

- **Update on the Health Committee Briefing:** Ariana Kelly provided an update on the House Health Committee briefing, noting that she presented on behalf of the collaborative's work, which coincided with discussions about OTC contraception work in higher education institutions. The briefing focused on the educational programs, and Ariana Kelly ensured the committee was aware of the history of Maryland's work in this space and thanked the Collaborative members and co-chairs for their participation. The committee received the interim report, which included two recommendations, and key questions from committee members intersected with the collaborative's work, particularly around educational access and retail coverage.
 - **Committee Concerns and Future Collaborative Work:** Committee members expressed concern about ensuring OTC contraception is available to non-college populations, methods for men (including condoms), and how to achieve retail coverage for covered consumers to avoid paying twice. Ariana Kelly concluded that the committee is eager to see the final report with productive recommendations but is also supportive of any accomplishments this year that do not require legislative action. Aliyah Horton raised a related question about the economics of vending machine prices for OTC products, which are often higher than in other retail settings.
- **Discussion on Vending Machine Pricing and Access:** Kelly Cleland provided background on vending machine models for sexual health products, noting that there is no reason for OTC O pill to be sold for \$40. Kelly Cleland explained that emergency contraception can be sold affordably through donation programs, even with a small markup to maintain sustainability, but this practice should not apply to essential products. Cynthia Baur suggested that the collaborative should investigate who sets the prices for vending machine items and consider whether this requires an interim action or a formal recommendation.
- **Required Review of Federal Comments:** Brett Jordan summarized the required activity of reviewing public comments from a 2023 Request for Information and a withdrawn 2024 proposed rule regarding federal OTC coverage, noting the key themes were not surprising. The key takeaways from the federal comments were

the importance of clear billing guidance for pharmacists and the complexity yet necessity of retail counter coverage across various purchase points (online, vending machines, grocery stores). Brett Jordan stated that the Collaborative has an opportunity to create a blueprint for the rest of the country by effectively addressing these issues.

- **Next Steps for Addressing the NPI Issue:** Cynthia Baur noted that the NPI billing issue has consistently surfaced as a core root problem and may be an area where state agencies can move forward immediately without waiting for a final recommendation. Aliyah Horton identified the Maryland Insurance Administration (MIA) and the Maryland Department of Health (MDH), specifically the Medicaid office, as the primary agencies that should be involved in this discussion. Sabrina Bassett explained that internal restructuring at MIA, including a new associate commissioner, means their position on guiding carriers on billing practices may change.
 - **Forming a Small Working Group on Billing Guidance:** Brett Jordan proposed pulling together a smaller group of interested members to lead the NPI billing issue and discuss how to offer guidance to plans in consultation with MIA, MDH, and potentially the Health Benefits Exchange. Sabrina Bassett stressed the importance of involving insurance carriers to ensure that any guidance aligns with their varied billing systems and practices. Joe Winn offered to serve as a liaison between the collaborative and the Medicaid MCOs and other payers, and Sabrina Bassett and Joe Winn volunteered to participate in the small working group.
- **Brainstorming on Public Education and Marketing:** The collaborative moved to the topic of public education and marketing, which was inspired by the "Free the Pill" presentation and supported by feedback from the opening poll. Aliyah Horton suggested forming a small work group to identify existing resources and avoid duplicating efforts in public outreach. Delia Angulo Chen shared that her organization, Advocates for Youth Free the Pill Council, has already created educational materials, such as a zine and pamphlets, and has experience with bulk distribution programs on college campuses, offering to share lessons learned.
- **Challenges in Consumer Education on Coverage:** Victoria Nichols highlighted a challenge in consumer education: state policies only influence state-regulated plans, making it difficult to clearly communicate to consumers about which plans

are eligible for coverage. Sabrina Bassett responded that the need for collaboration with carriers for communications and outreach.

- **Review of Potential Future Recommendations:** Aliyah Horton opened the floor for thoughts on future recommendations for the final report, noting that the NPI/access and communications issues are recurring core topics. Ariana Kelly reinforced the potential recommendation regarding condoms and devices, and suggested a recommendation focused on leveraging the infrastructure being built by campus access programs for broader public education and consumer outreach. Other ideas included utilizing the state employees plan for consumer education and leveraging the manufacturer's copay card programs to standardize low prices for consumers.
- **Targeting Outreach to Uninsured and Non-College Populations:** Cynthia Baur raised a critical point about the need to focus on the non-college, non-insured population, who are likely the least aware of and positioned to take advantage of the OTC benefit. This suggests that the collaborative may need to develop tiered recommendations or strategies tailored to specific population groups, and that expertise in social marketing will be necessary.
- **Social Marketing Expertise and Wrap-up:** Cynthia Baur confirmed that she can utilize social marketing expertise, and Aliyah Horton thanked Joe Wynn for volunteering to contribute his support on billing guidance. Aliyah Horton concluded that the conversation was productive, helped to focus on necessary work and next steps, and felt positive about the progress being made.
- **Schedule and Next Meeting Topic Adjustment:** Brett Jordan confirmed the next meeting is planned for early May and indicated that the topic will be changing. The group will focus on consumer education, marketing, and related challenges, which are considered outside the group's current strengths.
- **Working Group Formation and Communication:** The next meeting time has not been set yet, but Brett Jordan will schedule it ASAP. Brett Jordan will send out a request for volunteers to participate in the smaller working groups when distributing slides and notes later in the week.