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Contact:

Kate Stookey

Director of Public Affairs

Pathfinder International

Tel: +1. 617.972.1231

Mobile/What's App: +1.202.257.8146

Skype: pathfinder.kate.stookey

Global Health Leaders Call to Expand Contraceptive Choice for Adolescents and Youth to Include Long-Acting Reversible Methods

Bali, Indonesia – Leading global health organizations discussed their commitment to a new Global Consensus Statement supporting the expansion of contraceptive choice for young people to include long-acting reversible contraceptives (LARCs) at the International Conference of Family Planning in Bali. More than 40 leading global health and development organizations have endorsed the statement.

“The largest generation of young people the world has ever seen is entering reproductive age, and yet these young people too often face enormous barriers in accessing a full range of contraceptives, including long-acting reversible methods,” said Beth Schlachter, Executive Director, Family Planning 2020 (FP2020). “This statement is an important commitment to adolescents and youth, demonstrating that we stand together with them to support, advocate, and accelerate progress on ensuring full and informed access to quality products and services for all.”

A significant number of the world’s 1.8 billion adolescents and youth are sexually active and want to prevent or delay a pregnancy for multiple years – until finishing school, gaining employment, getting married, or to space their children. In spite of numerous statements and conventions supporting the rights of adolescents and youth to access contraception, their ability to exercise full contraceptive choice and access a wide range of methods, including LARCs, remains limited. Common barriers include lack of knowledge about contraceptive options, myths and misconceptions, provider bias, lack of family, partner and community support, negative social norms, and the absence of LARCs services, as well as restrictive laws and policies.

The International Federation of Gynecology and Obstetrics (FIGO) and the International Confederation of Midwives (ICM) recently stated they “... encourage obstetricians, gynecologists, and midwives... to work to promote strategies and remove barriers in their countries to the use of LARCs to meet young people’s reproductive health needs.” “Adolescents and youth are often not planning families and hence have long been neglected in “Family Planning” initiatives,” says FIGO President Professor C.N. Purandare. “What they need is contraceptive planning and options, including LARCs, offered in an enabling environment and in a non-discriminatory manner.”

The Consensus Statement calls for the provision of evidence-based information to policy makers, ministry representatives, program managers, service providers, communities, family members, and young people on the safety, effectiveness, reversibility, cost-effectiveness, acceptability, and the health and non-health benefits of contraceptive options, including LARCs. It notes that LARCs are highly effective contraceptive methods, and points out that both the American Congress of Obstetricians and Gynecologists and the American Academy of Pediatrics have issued statements affirming that LARCs are safe and appropriate for adolescents.

“Young people must be given the right to make decisions for themselves based on their individual needs and the varying contexts within which they live,” says Ramya Jawahar, from Bangalore, India, and currently Vice Chair of the International Youth Alliance for Family Planning (IYAFP). “If we want to advance human rights and health, we need to start investing in and empowering youth today.”

Developed by Pathfinder International, its Evidence to Action project, FHI360, Marie Stopes International (MSI), and Population Services International (PSI), the statement is intended to generate awareness about the right of all sexually active young people to have access to the widest available contraceptive options, including LARCs, regardless of marital status and parity.

The full list of endorsing organizations and the statement in English, French, and Spanish can be found at <http://www.familyplanning2020.org/youth-larc-statement>.

Organizations interested in endorsing the statement and individuals interested in supporting this effort are encouraged to visit the webpage for more information and to take action.

****PHOTO AND INTERVIEW OPPORTUNITY****

Media outlets interested in speaking with key stakeholders and supporters of the statement are invited to attend the free reception event “A Celebration of Young People’s Contraceptive Choice,” on Wednesday, January 27, from 1800 until 1930 at the Bali Nusa Dua Convention Center, Building 2, Mengwi 3+5.

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