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UD professor: Teens having babies costs U.S. billions

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Teens having babies cost U.S. taxpayers \$9.1 billion in 2004, according to a new national study by a University of Delaware professor.

Saul Hoffman, chairman of the school's economics department, headed the first comprehensive national estimate of the public cost of teen childbearing in a decade. The report also outlines expenditures by state, placing Delaware's estimated 2004 expense at \$28 million. That includes \$19 million in local/state and \$9 million in federal costs.

The study tracks the price of health care, foster care, child welfare, food stamps, incarceration and lower tax revenue, saying the most important costs are those associated with the children of teen mothers, who have higher health care expenses and lower earnings, and are more likely to end up in the foster care system and in prison. Calling the estimates "conservative," the report emphasizes that not all costs can be measured and that full public sector costs are higher.

"We know a lot about programs that are effective in delaying teen pregnancy. They are expensive," Hoffman said. "One of the things this does is provide state and federal governments with why" they should invest in them.

The report, "By the Numbers: The Public Costs of Teen Childbearing," was released by the National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, a nonprofit, nonpartisan group whose mission is to reduce the rate of teen pregnancy by one-third between 2006 and 2015.

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