

# COUNTING IT UP

## How to Use the Cost Data in Your Community

Teen pregnancy and birth rates have declined by about one-third since the early 1990s. Even so, three in ten teen girls become pregnant before age 20, there are more than 400,000 teen births each year, and the United States still has the highest rates of teen pregnancy and births among comparable countries. If the nation is to make continued progress in preventing too-early pregnancy and parenthood, we must resist complacency brought on by success and the inclination to drop an existing issue for something new and fresh. We must redouble our efforts, recognize the easy wins have already been won, and be even more intense and creative in our efforts.

Those concerned about too-early pregnancy and parenthood have an updated and important tool to attract the attention of policymakers, funders, new partners, the media, and the public. New data finds that teen childbearing cost federal, state, and local taxpayers at least \$10.9 billion in 2008. These public sector costs include health care, child welfare, incarceration, and lost revenue due to decreased earnings and spending.

Of course, the impressive declines in the teen birth rate—rates have declined nationally and in all 50 states and Washington, DC—have saved taxpayers costs as well. The decline in the teen birth rate between 1991 and 2008 saved taxpayers an estimated \$8.4 billion in 2008 alone (information on the costs of teen childbearing and savings related to the decline in teen birth rates in each state can be found at [www.TheNationalCampaign.org/costs](http://www.TheNationalCampaign.org/costs)).

Practitioners and advocates are encouraged to use the ideas below on how to use the state-specific costs of teen childbearing with policymakers, funders, new partners, the media, and the public.

### 1. Educate policymakers, community leaders, and business leaders on the importance of teen pregnancy.

Policymakers may become interested in reducing teen pregnancy for a number of reasons, including the cost of teen childbearing to taxpayers.

- Conduct a briefing for policymakers and community leaders on the new data. Ask a policymaker to speak at your event

about why he/she cares about teen pregnancy. As elected officials at the local, state, and federal level struggle with budget challenges, present evidence that preventing teen pregnancy is a cost-effective strategy that makes good fiscal sense.

- Hold a briefing for business leaders. Offer to make a presentation to your local chamber of commerce or rotary club on the economic impact of teen pregnancy. Highlight both the taxpayer costs and how preventing teen pregnancy will lead to a better educated and more competitive workforce.
- Offer policymakers specific suggestions on what to do. Policymakers who are concerned about the costs of teen childbearing in their state are, obviously, more inclined to do something about it. Please refer them to the fact sheet *What Policymakers Can Do* at [www.TheNationalCampaign.org/costs](http://www.TheNationalCampaign.org/costs).

### 2. Pitch your state's data to local media

The media is always looking for new data to highlight, especially state data. Put a new spin on an old story by highlighting the cost of teen childbearing in your state and efforts to reduce teen pregnancy in your community. Contact a variety of media outlets such as television, newspapers, community magazines, Internet sites, and local bloggers.

- Send your state press release to local media outlets.
- Create your own press release on the data.
- Conduct a press conference.
- Set up a meeting with your paper's editorial board. Persuaded in part by the economic impact of teen pregnancy, editorial boards for *The Bakersfield Californian* and the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* have made teen pregnancy a priority issue.
- Contact reporters who specialize in health and/or children's issues.
- Write a letter to the editor or an op-ed or encourage other prominent community leaders to do so.

### 3. Reach out to new partners

Taxpayers shoulder a significant financial burden for teen childbearing through increased public health care, child welfare, and criminal justice costs. Teen childbearing also has a significant impact on the amount of tax revenues available to support public policy priorities. Let those not traditionally aligned with efforts to prevent teen pregnancy know how early pregnancy and childbearing affects their bottom line. For example, foster care organizations should be interested in teen pregnancy—not only are foster care youth at greater risk for early pregnancy, but teen births are costly to the foster care system as well. Similarly, consider reaching out to juvenile and family court judges who see the impact of teen pregnancy first-hand. saved by taxpayers in 2008 alone due to the approximately one-third decline in the teen birth rate between 1991 and 2008.

### 4. Highlight the cost data in your organization's materials, fact sheets, and newsletters

Educate your partner organizations and constituents by including the cost data in your communications with them. Here are a few examples of how others have used the cost data in the past:

- **The Massachusetts Alliance on Teen Pregnancy** used cost data in a script it developed for supporters to use with the state Senators and Representatives encouraging them to invest in preventing teen pregnancy.  
[www.massteenpregnancy.org/support/news/call-your-legislators](http://www.massteenpregnancy.org/support/news/call-your-legislators)
- **Teenwise Minnesota** used cost data to encourage participation in National Teen Pregnancy Prevention Month.  
[www.moapp.org/outreach/teen\\_pregnancy\\_prevention\\_month.html](http://www.moapp.org/outreach/teen_pregnancy_prevention_month.html)
- **The Georgia Campaign for Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention** has used cost data in many ways. When federal funding for preventing teen pregnancy was threatened, GCAPP included cost data in an alert to supporters encouraging them to contact Congress.  
[www.gcapp.org/news/act-now-save-georgias-teen-pregnancy-prevention-programs](http://www.gcapp.org/news/act-now-save-georgias-teen-pregnancy-prevention-programs)
- **The South Carolina Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, along with the New Morning Foundation's "Tell Them" advocacy network**, used cost data in developing a local white

paper detailing the economic impact of teen pregnancy and how it affects the state budget.

[www.teenpregnancysc.org/uploads/Save%20SC%20\\$180%20Million.pdf](http://www.teenpregnancysc.org/uploads/Save%20SC%20$180%20Million.pdf)

- In 2011, **Senator Diane Feinstein** used cost data—and the savings realized by the declines in teen births—in a speech on the Senate floor supporting continued federal funding for proven efforts to prevent teen pregnancy.
- **The National Governors' Association** included information about the cost data, along with links to state materials, in NGA's weekly email to 400 governors' policy advisory.
- **The National Association of County and City Health Officials** used cost data in a report entitled, *Meeting the Needs of Pregnant and Parenting Teens: Local Health Department Programs and Services*.
- Calling it a "landmark" report, the **Child Welfare League of America** used cost data in an alert to members and to note, in particular, that special attention be given to youth in foster care in strategies to prevent teen pregnancy.  
[www.cwla.org/advocacy/teenpregnancy.htm](http://www.cwla.org/advocacy/teenpregnancy.htm)
- **The Arizona Coalition on Adolescent Pregnancy and Parenting** hosted a meeting for state legislators, members of the Governor's office, school administrators, and others to discuss the cost data.
- **The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention**, which has declared teen pregnancy one of its "winnable battles," highlighted the costs of teen childbearing in its April 2011 report on *Preventing Teen Pregnancy in the United States*.