

BY THE NUMBERS



THE PUBLIC COSTS OF TEEN CHILDBEARING HOW TO USE THE COST DATA WITHIN YOUR COMMUNITY

Teen pregnancy and birth rates have declined by about a third since the early 1990s. Even so, one in three teen girls become pregnant before age 20, 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.

Teen pregnancy prevention practitioners and advocates have a new and important tool to attract the attention of policymakers, funders, new partners, the media, and the public. New research released by the National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy finds that teen childbearing costs federal, state, and local taxpayers at least **\$9.1 billion** annually, including public sector costs for health care, child welfare and incarceration, and lost revenue due to lower taxes paid by the children of teen mothers over their own adult lifetimes. Moreover, it is estimated that the decline in the U.S. teen birth rate saved taxpayers an estimated **\$6.7 billion** in 2004 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.teenpregnancy.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.** It's just as important to educate community leaders and policymakers as it is to engage them. Ask a policymaker to speak at your event about why he/she cares about teen pregnancy.
- **Hold a briefing for business leaders.** Offer to make a presentation for your local chamber of commerce or rotary club on the cost of teen childbearing or teen pregnancy.
- **Offer policymakers specific suggestions on what to do.** Policymakers who are concerned about the costs of teen childbearing in their state will want to do something about it. Please refer them to the fact sheet, *The Public Costs of Teen Childbearing: What Policymakers Can Do* at www.teenpregnancy.org/costs.

2. PITCH YOUR STATE'S DATA TO LOCAL MEDIA

The media is constantly looking for new data to highlight, especially local data. Put a new spin on teen pregnancy 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, and Internet sites.

- 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.
- 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.

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.

CASE STUDY

The Arizona Coalition on Adolescent Pregnancy and Parenting (ACAPP) hosted a breakfast meeting for community leaders to release data on the costs of teen childbearing in Arizona. The event was attended by 50 people including state legislators, the Governor's office, the Chamber of Commerce, school administrators, state and local health departments, faith leaders, private funders, and the press. Presentations were made on Arizona's teen pregnancy trends, the cost of teen childbearing to Arizona taxpayers, and local effective programs. The Mayor of Phoenix, who adopted a child born to a young teen parent, spoke at the event as well as a former Mayor of Phoenix and a current State Legislator, both of whom had been teen parents.

ACAPP's executive director, Patricia Jo Angelini, pitched the cost story to the media through in-person meetings and telephone calls with reporters and editorial board writers, and got the breakfast meeting scheduled on the Associated Press calendar of events. This outreach, coupled with media presence at the community leader breakfast, generated significant press attention in Arizona newspapers and television. After receiving the cost data during a meeting with ACAPP, an editorial board writer for the *Arizona Republic* agreed to ask each gubernatorial and state legislative candidate what they would do if elected to prevent teen pregnancy and assist teen parents.

ACAPP also featured a presentation on the Arizona costs of teen childbearing during their annual conference with program providers.