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## Reducing Unplanned Pregnancy: A New Campaign Takes Shape

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When the National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy (Campaign) was established in 1996, it set the goal of reducing the teen pregnancy rate by one-third in ten years. The final numbers are not in yet, but it appears that this goal will be met. While the rate of teen pregnancy has dropped, there has been no comparable decline in the rate among young adults, mostly notably the 20-24 age group. In fact, the overall unplanned pregnancy rate for all ages but teens remained unchanged between 1994 and 2001.

Those figures might be unremarkable, except for the fact that recent research shows that about one-half of all pregnancies in the U.S. are unplanned. Because of this, the Campaign—one of the few nonpartisan research and education groups on the subjects of sexuality and pregnancy—recently announced that it will expand its mission to include reducing unplanned pregnancies for single, young adults (while still maintaining a focus on teen pregnancy).

"While our mission is expanding, our ultimate goal is not—we will continue to work to improve the well-being of children, families and society," said Sarah Brown, chief executive officer of the Campaign.

The Campaign's focus on "unplanned" pregnancies is crucial. Nearly half of the pregnancies in the United States are "unplanned." Of those about twenty percent are mistimed by less than 2 years. These pregnancies are considered slightly mistimed but not unwelcomed. In contrast, more than 40 percent of unplanned pregnancies are considered "unwanted" and are experienced by women who say they did not want to be pregnant at that time or at any time in the future.

Children born from unplanned, especially unwanted, pregnancies: are more likely to be premature and low-birth

weight since these women are less likely to receive prenatal care; and face risks of developmental problems and have poorer physical and mental health.

Cognitive tests of children born from an unplanned pregnancy show that these children have significantly lower test scores in listening, vocabulary, memory and communication. The majority of children from these pregnancies are born to single mothers. Children in one-parent families are twice as likely to drop out of high school, 2.5 times more likely to become teen mothers and five times more likely to live in poverty as children in two-parent families.

"By reducing the high number of unplanned, and especially unwanted pregnancies among young adults in their 20s and early 30s—in addition to helping teens avoid early pregnancy—young people will have more opportunities and control over their lives; more children will grow up in intact, married families; there will be less poverty, lower public costs and a lighter burden on taxpayers; and less need for abortion," said Brown.

Of all the pregnancies in the nation, one-half are unplanned, with 22 percent resulting in births, 20 percent ending in abortions and 6 percent ending in miscarriages. Reducing unplanned pregnancies would reduce the 1.2 million abortions that are performed annually in the United States.

The immediate goal of the Campaign is to make the public and policymakers aware of this problem. Soon, Campaign members will be setting a reduction goal similar to their goals for reducing teen pregnancies. Even though the rate of teen pregnancy has declined steadily in the United States since the early 1990s, it still remains high when compared to other westernized countries. A recent report from the Campaign found that teen childbearing still costs the public sector at least \$9.1 billion annually.