



Press Release, 4/13/07

For immediate release: 2007

Contact: Bill Albert, 202-478-8510

balbert@teenpregnancy.org

National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy Statement on Abstinence-Only Program Evaluation.

(Washington, DC) In response to a new evaluation of abstinence-only programs released today by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy released the following statement from Executive Director Sarah Brown:

“The National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy has long cautioned that the jury is out on the effectiveness of abstinence-only programs. The jury has now returned with a verdict on the effectiveness of four carefully selected, well-evaluated abstinence-only programs and the news is not good.

The careful evaluation of the abstinence-only programs conducted by Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. shows that youth enrolled in the abstinence-only programs were no more likely than those not in the programs to delay sexual initiation, have fewer sexual partners, or abstain from sex entirely.

Even so, it is important to note that there is a profound difference between abstinence as a *message* and abstinence-only *interventions*. The American public—both adults and teens—remain deeply committed to encouraging teens to delay sexual activity *and* to providing young people with information about contraception. The vast majority of the public does not see abstinence and contraception as an either/or proposition—they want teens to be informed of both. A recent nationally-representative survey conducted for the National Campaign shows that nine in ten adults and teens agree that young people should get a strong message that they should not have sex until they are at least of our high school *and* the clear majority of adults (73%) and teens (56%) wish teens were getting more information about abstinence and contraception rather than either/or (see *With One Voice 2007*, www.teenpregnancy.org).

Although this new evaluation report shows that the four programs studied were not able to delay sexual activity among the young people enrolled, there *are* a number of interventions that *have* been carefully assessed and shown to do so. These programs discuss both abstinence and contraception. Some of these programs also improved contraceptive use and/or prevented teen pregnancy.

Having been immersed in this field and all the reports and programs over many years, the main Campaign message is this: we need better programs and interventions that can lead to clear delays in sexual activity among young people and to better contraceptive use among those who are sexually active. Although there has been a 14% decline between 1991 and 2005 in the proportion of high school students who have had sexual intercourse (CDC Youth Risk Behavior Survey), and the teen pregnancy and birth rates have declined by one-third since the early 1990s,

the United States still has the highest rate of teen pregnancy in the industrialized world, and 3 in 10 teen girls get pregnant at least once before their 20th birthday. And there is some evidence to suggest that the remarkable progress the nation has made in this area is slowing. All such data and trends suggest that if the nation is to make further progress in delaying sexual activity and preventing early pregnancy and parenthood, our collective efforts will need to be more creative, more intense, and more targeted. We applaud this carefully conducted evaluation of selected abstinence programs and encourage researchers, policymakers and others to continue to push hard for research-based solutions to preventing early pregnancy and parenthood. Today's report should be seen as a beginning, rather than an end."

About the National Campaign. Founded in 1996, the National Campaign is a private, nonprofit organization with the goal of reducing the teen pregnancy rate by one-third between 2006 and 2015.

###