

Briefly...

2011 Federal Policy Agenda

About The National Campaign

The National Campaign is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization whose mission is to improve the lives and future prospects of children and families and, in particular, to help ensure that children are born into stable, two-parent families who are committed to and ready for the demanding task of raising the next generation. Our specific strategy for reaching this goal is to prevent teen and unplanned pregnancy among single, young adults.

The National Campaign works on many fronts to reach its goal, including cultivating relationships with such key sectors as the entertainment and news media, faith communities, policymakers, the business community, state and local leaders, parents, and both youth and young adults themselves. We support a combination of responsible values and behavior by both men and women and responsible policies in both the public and private sectors.

If we succeed in preventing both teen and unplanned pregnancy, child and family well-being will improve. In particular, there will be a better educated and prepared competitive workforce, less poverty, healthier children and families, and lower taxpayer costs. Less unplanned pregnancy also means fewer abortions—a fact that should help those on both sides of the abortion debate find common ground.

The Facts

- Since the early 1990s, the teen pregnancy and birth rates have declined by about one-third. The teen birth rate in the United States declined 6% in 2009 and is now at a record low as is the national teen pregnancy rate. Rates declined among older and younger teens and among all racial and ethnic groups. For example, the birth rate among Hispanic teens declined 10% in 2009.
- However, it is still the case that 3 in 10 girls in the United States become pregnant at least once by age 20, resulting in well over 400,000 teen births each year.
- Fully 30% of teen girls cite pregnancy/parenthood as a key reason for dropping out of high school; rates are even higher for African American and Latino girls. Nine in ten teens (87%) and adults (90%) believe that reducing teen pregnancy is a very effective way to reduce the high school dropout rate and improve academic achievement.
- It is not just teens who are having difficulty with pregnancy planning and prevention. Nearly all unmarried young adults believe pregnancy should be planned and say that it is important to avoid pregnancy in their lives right now, yet only about half of sexually active unmarried young adults use contraception regularly. Given this gap between aspirations and behavior, it is not surprising that 7 in 10 pregnancies among unmarried women in their 20s are unplanned (1.1 million annually).
- Overall, half of all pregnancies in the United States are unplanned as reported by women themselves (approximately 3 million annually).
- Rates of unplanned pregnancy have stayed nearly constant since 1994, and are actually increasing among some of the nation's most disadvantaged populations.

- 89% of voters favor public funding for family planning services, and 72% of Republicans and Independents favor legislation that would make it easier for people at all income levels to obtain contraception.
- 90% of Evangelicals find birth control or other hormonal methods of contraception acceptable for those 18 and over, and 90% of the Board of the National Association of Evangelicals approves of contraception.

Why It Matters

Now more than ever, it is important to intensify efforts to reduce teen and unplanned pregnancy. The nation has made truly remarkable progress in preventing teen pregnancy and parenthood. However, rates in the United States remain far higher than in other fully developed countries and rates of unplanned pregnancy have remained stagnant. Lowering the rate of teen and unplanned pregnancy helps reduce poverty and improve educational achievement, workforce competitiveness, child welfare, and other critical social issues for both parents and children. If we are serious about reducing the federal deficit, strengthening economic competitiveness, improving the health and well-being of families, and reducing abortion in this country, it is critical that we invest in programs that are proven to prevent teen and unplanned pregnancy.

Policy Priorities

There are many different ways to reduce both teen and unplanned pregnancy and public policy certainly plays a key role. Two overarching themes of The National Campaign's public policy recommendations are to focus on what works and to "connect the dots" across initiatives and agencies in order to create opportunities for embedding discussions of pregnancy planning and prevention in programs that reach large numbers of teens and young people at risk. In particular, there are a number of areas where having or causing a teen/unplanned pregnancy could interfere with these programs' goals, such as improving graduation rates, building a strong workforce, and strengthening our economy. With these goals in mind, the following policy areas are a high priority for The National Campaign. We urge policymakers to continue investments in these programs to help make further progress on reducing teen and unplanned pregnancy in this country.

Protect Teen Pregnancy Prevention Funding Streams

The establishment of mandatory and discretionary federal funding for evidence-based teen pregnancy prevention programs was a major legislative gain in 2010. These funds now support more than 150 grants to state, community, and tribal organizations and agencies to carry out programs that have been shown to have a positive effect on teen sexual behavior. Providing ongoing and stable funding for these programs is a high priority. It is extremely difficult for states and other grantees to plan, carry out, and evaluate programs when year to year funding is highly uncertain. Given that teen pregnancy rates remain quite high and that CDC director Thomas Frieden has named teen pregnancy one of six public health issues that are "winnable battles," it is important that resources continue to be available for these programs. Policymakers should:

- Increase funding for the Teenage Pregnancy Prevention Initiative administered by U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Office of Adolescent Health, which provides competitive grants to a wide variety of organizations and emphasizes evidence and evaluation.
- Maintain mandatory funding for the Personal Responsibility Education Program (PREP) (administered by HHS' Administration for Children and Families), which provides formula grants to states, tribes, and territories for evidence-based programs that reduce teen pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections.
- Provide adequate funding for the Centers for Disease Control's Safe Motherhood Program, which includes important efforts to reduce teen pregnancy as well as other critical issues.

For additional information, see www.TheNationalCampaign.org/policymakers/PDF/Overview_FedFundingStreams.pdf.

Provide Adequate Funding for Contraception to Help Prevent Unplanned Pregnancy

The CDC named family planning as one of the 10 greatest public health achievements of the 20th century—an advancement that has allowed women, in particular, to participate fully in educational attainment and the workforce. In addition, reducing unintended

pregnancy and increasing the proportion of women in need of publicly supported contraceptive services and supplies who receive them are identified as key objectives in *Healthy People 2020: Goals and Objectives*. The need for Title X is much greater than the program can currently serve. In 2008 (the most recent year for which data is available) 17.4 million women were in need of publicly funded contraceptive services and supplies. For every dollar spent, Title X saves taxpayers \$3.74 and reduces abortion. It is also important to adequately fund other programs that help to reduce unplanned pregnancy, including the Maternal and Child Health Block Grant, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and Community Health Centers. Policymakers should:

- Increase funding for Title X which plays a critical role in preventing unplanned pregnancy by offering low-income and uninsured individuals access to high-quality contraceptive services, preventive screenings, and health education.

For additional information, see www.TheNationalCampaign.org/resources/pdf/Briefly_PolicyBrief_TitleX.pdf.

Health Reform Implementation

With the implementation of the Affordable Care Act (ACA) underway, it is important to ensure access to affordable and effective contraception. Health reform includes a number of provisions that help to reduce teen and unplanned pregnancy, such as allowing young adults to stay on their parents' insurance plans until age 26 and allowing states to provide Medicaid family planning at the same eligibility rate as pregnancy-related care. Studies continue to show that expanding access to Medicaid family planning services not only reduces unplanned pregnancy, but produces substantial cost savings for state and federal budgets. Medicaid-funded family planning saves millions of dollars for states and the federal government. It is important, especially in such fiscally strained times, that states use the tools available to them to save money.

As the Administration proceeds with developing guidelines for other important provisions, it is critical that pregnancy planning and prevention is included as a women's preventive service exempt from cost-sharing, and included in the essential health benefits package required for health insurance plans participating in the state exchanges. In addition, teen and unplanned pregnancy prevention should be part of the National Prevention Strategy. The Administration should:

- Ensure access to affordable and effective contraception. For additional information about family planning as a key preventive service, see www.TheNationalCampaign.org/policymakers/PDF/IOM_MakingtheCase.pdf.
- Expand Medicaid family planning through either a waiver or state plan amendment. Both options yield significant cost savings and ensure that Medicaid family planning services are more widely available to the women and men who need them. For additional information, see www.TheNationalCampaign.org/resources/pdf/Briefly_Policy%20Brief_ExpandingMedicaid.pdf.

Preventing Teen Pregnancy is Critical to School Completion

One of every three students (1.3 million annually) fails to graduate from high school in this country, and the crisis is even more severe among minority students. Yet as federal, state, and local officials, community and business leaders, social entrepreneurs, and philanthropists develop strategies that will help reduce these alarming dropout rates, an important piece of the puzzle—too-early pregnancy and parenthood—is often neglected. Only 40% of teen mothers finish high school and less than 2% of teen mothers finish college by age 30. For additional information, see www.TheNationalCampaign.org/resources/pdf/Briefly_PolicyBrief_School_Completion.pdf.

The crisis extends to postsecondary institutions as well. Unplanned pregnancies increase the risk of dropping out or stopping out of college—61% of women who have children after enrolling in community college fail to finish their degree, which is 65% higher than the rate for those who didn't have children. For additional information, see www.TheNationalCampaign.org/resources/pdf/briefly-unplanned-pregnancy-and-community-colleges.pdf. Policymakers should:

- Pursue opportunities in the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act and other educational reform initiatives to address teen pregnancy as one key factor in improving school performance and completion by encouraging collaboration at the federal, state, and local level between those working on improving education and preventing teen pregnancy. In addition, include pregnancy planning and prevention as one important aspect of initiatives to increase the number of college graduates, especially efforts to improve completion at the community college level.

Increase the Focus on the Responsibilities of Men in Preventing Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy

Too often, the notion of responsible fatherhood starts once someone becomes a father. However, responsible fatherhood should *also* mean waiting to become a father until one is emotionally and financially prepared. More must be done to involve men in a meaningful way to prevent unplanned pregnancy—through both primary prevention and prevention of subsequent pregnancies by men who already have at least one child. Policymakers should:

- Incorporate discussion of pregnancy prevention and planning in federally funded programs serving significant numbers of men. Such programs could include child support, job training/workforce development, juvenile justice/criminal justice/re-entry, responsible fatherhood, healthy relationships and marriage, and the military.

Incorporate Family Formation Discussions into Programs that Focus on Self-Sufficiency and Family Strengthening

Seventy percent of all unplanned pregnancies among unmarried 20-somethings are not first pregnancies. Existing programs that provide support for vulnerable families provide natural settings where it is possible to incorporate discussions about family planning, healthy relationships, and pregnancy spacing and how early or unplanned pregnancy can affect prospects for children and their parents. These programs include Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, home visiting programs, responsible fatherhood and marriage programs, Head Start/Early Head Start, Promise Neighborhoods, and workforce development programs for youth and adults. For additional information, see www.TheNationalCampaign.org/resources/pdf/Briefly_PolicyBrief_HelpingFamilies_PregnancyPlanning.pdf. Policymakers should consider:

- Encouraging discussions of pregnancy prevention and planning within existing program guidelines and standards.

Support Parents and Other Caring Adults in Communicating with Young People

Teens continue to say that parents most influence their decisions about sex. Eight in ten teens say that it would be much easier for teens to delay sexual activity and avoid teen pregnancy if they were able to have more open, honest conversations about these topics with their parents. Six in ten teens and adults agree that the *primary* reason teens don't use contraception is because they are afraid that their parents will find out, and there is evidence that this is a barrier for young adults as well. Policymakers should:

- Provide encouragement and support for parents and other adults to communicate about sex, love, and relationships with the next generation.

Help Change Social Norms through the Media

Teens and young adults are voracious media consumers—for entertainment, information, and communicating with their peers. Policymakers have harnessed the power of the media for other important public health goals by funding public service and communication campaigns. Both traditional and digital media offer powerful and relatively inexpensive ways to communicate with large numbers of young people about the consequences of early and unplanned pregnancy, and how to avoid it. Policymakers should consider:

- Investing in innovative efforts to use media to change social norms and provide user-friendly information about preventing teen and unplanned pregnancy.

Strengthen Data Collection and Knowledge on Pregnancy and Childbearing

Although birth data are quite accessible, solid data on sexual activity, contraceptive use, pregnancy, and abortion are more difficult to obtain, are collected episodically, and are often only available several years after they were collected. Such data are essential for tracking progress at the national and state level, identifying disparities among different segments of the population, informing the public, policymakers, practitioners, and the media about teen and unplanned pregnancy, and mobilizing evidence-based action. Policymakers should consider:

- Providing adequate resources to put the National Center for Health Statistics on track to become a fully-functioning, 21st Century, national statistics agency and bring the remaining states into the Pregnancy Risk Assessment Monitoring System (PRAMS).