

Briefly...

A Summary of Effective Interventions

The U.S. teen birth rate has declined a stunning 44% between 1991 and 2010. This decline has been impressive in all 50 states and among all racial/ethnic groups. Despite this success, it remains the case that 3 in 10 girls in the U.S. become pregnant before their 20th birthday. The U.S. also has much higher rates of teen pregnancy and childbearing compared to other developed countries compromising educational attainment, economic opportunity, and workforce competitiveness. In addition, teen childbearing costs taxpayers at least \$10.9 billion annually. Investment in programs that have been shown to reduce risky sexual behavior and/or pregnancy among teens remains critical in order to continue the nation's progress in reducing too-early pregnancy and parenthood.

Effective Intervention. There is now persuasive and growing evidence that a number of programs can:

- delay teen sexual activity,
- improve contraceptive use among sexually active teens, and/or
- prevent teen pregnancy.

At present, The National Campaign counts a total of 32 programs that have been shown through strong evaluation to have a positive effect on at least one of the three outcomes above. This includes 25 programs that have strong evidence of success from a rigorous evaluation—meaning that the programs were evaluated using a randomized controlled trial design (also called an experimental design). An additional seven programs that are promising but whose evidence of success is not as strong, because they were evaluated using a quasi-experimental design, are also included. Most of the programs with the strongest evidence of success are those that encourage abstinence as the safest choice for teens and also encourage those who do have sex to use contraception. Most successful programs are curriculum-based sex and sexually transmitted infections (STI)/HIV education programs; some focus on

youth development and community service; some are abstinence-only programs or have a very strong abstinence message; a few successful interventions involve parents; still others take a very broad approach that includes healthcare, academic assistance, sex education, and other services. In addition, there are a number of clinic-based programs that have been shown to increase the use of contraceptive services by teens and/or to reduce teen pregnancy. In short, because of the significant variety among these interventions, communities now have more choices and more opportunities than ever to find programs that suit local values, opportunities, and budgets.

Please see [What Works 2011-2012: Curriculum-Based Programs That Prevent Teen Pregnancy](#), [What Helps in Providing Contraceptive Services for Teens?](#), and [Emerging Answers 2007](#) for more information on effective interventions. These publications are available for download at www.TheNationalCampaign.org. The Office of Adolescent Health has also identified a [list of effective programs](#).

Some Thoughts on Abstinence. There is now strong evidence from a rigorous evaluation that an abstinence-only intervention can help very young teens delay sex as well as reduce recent sexual activity. It is worth noting that the program did not advocate abstinence until marriage, did not portray sex in a negative light or suggest that condoms are ineffective, and contained only medically accurate information. Another abstinence-only program has been shown through a less rigorous evaluation to be successful in delaying sexual activity, and one curriculum that mostly emphasizes helping youth delay sex but provides some information about contraception has been shown to achieve positive results, particularly among Latino youth.

The National Campaign believes that abstinence should be strongly stressed as the best choice for teens because delaying sex

is the most effective way for teens to avoid too-early pregnancy and parenthood as well as STIs. A strong message to delay sex is also consistent with the beliefs of adults and teens. In addition to encouraging teens to delay sexual activity, The National Campaign—along with the majority of the American public—supports efforts to provide full and accurate information to teens about contraception in order to help those who are sexually active avoid pregnancy and disease. Encouraging abstinence and teaching about contraception are not *competing* strategies, but rather *complimentary* ones.

A Note of Caution About Effective Programs. Even those programs that have been shown to be effective in changing teen sexual behavior may have relatively modest results. There may also be programs, already in existence or newly emerging, that may be effective in helping young people avoid risky sexual behavior but have simply not yet been carefully evaluated. The nation's roster of effective programs using a variety of approaches is likely to grow as more evaluation results become available.

A Final Thought. Since teen pregnancy is rooted partly in popular culture and social values, it is unreasonable to expect that programs alone can change such large forces. Reducing teen pregnancy requires a combination of community programs *and* broader efforts to influence social norms, values, and popular culture by parents, families, faith communities, and the media. It also requires ensuring that teens who are sexually active have access to effective contraception.