

Briefly...

2009 Federal Policy Agenda

Who We Are

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 pregnancy 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.

What We Know

- Three in ten teen girls gets pregnant at least once before the age of 20, resulting in well over 400,000 teen births each year, and the United States still has the highest teen pregnancy and birth rates in the industrialized world.
- Recent data suggest that the significant progress in reducing teen pregnancy and birth rates since the early 1990s may now be reversing: teen birth rates increased for the first time in 15 years in 2006.
- Half of all pregnancies in the United States are unplanned (approximately 3 million annually) and more than one-third of these (1.1 million) were to unmarried women in their 20s.
- Unplanned pregnancy has been stalled in recent years, and, in fact, is getting worse for some groups.
- Teen childbearing cost taxpayers \$9.1 billion nationally in 2004 and the one-third decline in teen childbearing between 1991 and 2004 *saved* taxpayers \$6.7 billion in 2004 alone.

Why It Matters

Teen and unplanned pregnancy is linked to a number of negative outcomes for parents and children. Women experiencing an unplanned pregnancy are less likely than women who have an intended pregnancy to obtain early prenatal care and their babies are at increased risk of both low birth weight and infant mortality. Births resulting from unplanned pregnancies lead to higher levels of chaos and relationship turmoil between the parents and within the family. And children born outside of two-parent married families are more likely to be poor, have lower academic achievement, and drop out of high school. (The majority of children born as a result of an unplanned pregnancy are born to unmarried women.)

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

What Policymakers Can Do

There are many different solutions to the widespread problems of teen and unplanned pregnancy, at the individual and societal level, and public policy certainly plays a key role. The following public policy actions would help ensure that teens and young adults have the necessary tools to make wise choices regarding pregnancy and childbearing:

- **Include pregnancy prevention as an essential element in health reform.** While chronic disease prevention has become a key element in the discussion of health care reform, more attention should also be paid to pregnancy prevention, which has both health and economic implications for consumers and tax payers alike. Preventing unplanned pregnancy is a cost-effective health care investment—every dollar spent on publicly-funded family planning services saves \$4.02 in public sector maternal and infant care costs. Increasing health coverage through a combination of private and public systems and enhancing access to family planning counseling, services, and coverage for a full range of FDA-approved family planning methods can help ensure that more care and intentionality surround pregnancy, childbearing, and family formation. For more information, see [Policy Brief: Health Care Reform](#) and [Policy Brief: Strengthening America's Family Planning Safety Net in the Context of Health Reform](#).
- **Provide states and communities with the flexibility and funding to put in place effective interventions to educate young people about responsible sexual behavior.** Most American parents and teens agree that young people benefit from both a strong message of abstinence and information that will help them avoid pregnancy and STIs if and when they become sexually active. Evidence shows that a growing number of programs that encourage abstinence and that also give complete and accurate information about contraception can delay sexual activity, improve contraceptive use, and/or prevent teen pregnancy. Given fiscal constraints and the recent increase in the teen birth rate, states need the flexibility and the resources to support programs that have stronger evidence of effectiveness and respond to community needs. More must also be done to continue developing and testing a range of evidence-based programs including programs with a strong abstinence message and programs for underserved populations. Finally, these efforts would be enhanced by a national clearinghouse to offer information and technical assistance about effective strategies. For more information, see [Policy Brief: Funding to States and Communities for Effective Teen Pregnancy Prevention Interventions](#).
- **Reduce disparities by focusing investments on communities with high rates.** Despite substantial progress in reducing teen pregnancy in all states and among all ethnic and racial groups, there are disparities in that progress. For example, Latina teens and African-American teen girls are more likely than not to become pregnant—53 percent of Latinas and 51 percent of African-American teen girls become pregnant at least once before age 20. Additionally, by age 19, nearly half of all teen girls in foster care have been pregnant at least once, and 20 percent of these teen mothers have a subsequent birth before age 20. In efforts to reduce teen and unplanned pregnancy, particular attention needs to be paid to communities with the highest rates. For more information, see [Policy Brief: Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Teen Pregnancy](#).
- **Increase the focus on the responsibilities of men in preventing teen and unplanned pregnancy.** More than half of pregnancies reported by unmarried men in their 20s are unplanned. More must be done to involve men in a meaningful way to prevent unplanned pregnancy—both primary prevention and prevention of subsequent pregnancies by men who already have at least one child. Steps could be taken to address pregnancy prevention in federally funded programs serving significant numbers of men, such as responsible fatherhood, workforce development, and re-entry programs. Programs should help participants think about how unplanned pregnancy may affect their plans and goals, as well as the consequences for their children. For more information, see [Policy Brief: Promoting Responsible Fatherhood through Pregnancy Planning and Prevention](#).

- **Strengthen the connection between prevention of teen and unplanned pregnancy and healthy relationships and marriage.** There has been a significant policy focus on strengthening families and investment in promoting healthy relationships and marriage in order to advance child well-being. Unplanned pregnancy has a negative impact on relationship stability and child well-being. Seven in ten pregnancies among unmarried women are unplanned. Programs addressing relationships and marriage should also educate couples about the benefits of pregnancy planning on their relationships, their goals, and on outcomes for their children.
- **Ensure greater access to affordable services and information that help prevent unplanned pregnancy, including subsequent pregnancies, for the uninsured and underinsured.** Medicaid, Title X, and SCHIP all play a vital role in providing family planning to lower-income families, but are not able to meet the need. In 2002, 16.8 million women were in need of publicly subsidized family planning services, yet public funding was able to serve only 6.7 million women. Strengthening Title X, Medicaid, and SCHIP would help millions of Americans obtain this key element of basic health care. Also, investing in evidence-based programs, specifically nurse home visiting programs, that help reduce subsequent unplanned pregnancies—which make up more than 70 percent of all unplanned pregnancies among 20-somethings—could improve maternal and child health and well-being. For more information, see [Policy Brief: Title X](#) and [Policy Brief: Strengthening Medicaid Family Planning](#).
- **Take action to prevent unplanned pregnancy among community college students.** More than one million unplanned pregnancies occur to single women in their 20s—a group that includes many in community colleges and other similar institutions. An unplanned pregnancy that occurs while attending these institutions directly affects students' ability to succeed. For example, 61 percent of women who have children after enrolling in community college fail to finish their degree, a rate that is 65 percent higher than the rate for women who don't have children. Given their standing and respected presence in communities around the country, community colleges and similar institutions should become part of an effective and far reaching effort to reduce the high rates of unplanned pregnancy among young adults which will in turn improve student retention and success. For more information, see [Briefly: Unplanned Pregnancy and Community Colleges](#).
- **Support parents and other caring adults in communicating their values to the teens in their lives.** Teens consistently say that parents most influence their decisions about sex. However, the vast majority of parents (82%) agree that when it comes to talking about sex, they often don't know what to say, how to say it, or when to start the conversation. Investments should be made to help parents—through a variety of innovative and user-friendly resources—communicate their values on sex, love, and relationships to the next generation.
- **Help change social norms by using various media.** Teens and young adults are voracious media consumers—for entertainment, information, and communicating with peers. Lawmakers have harnessed the power of the media for other important public health goals by funding various public service and communication campaigns. Similar efforts could help impress upon our nation that starting families and raising children is one of the most important tasks any of us undertake, and it needs to be approached with care, thought and deep awareness of what's at stake.
- **Eliminate barriers to affordable family planning.** The average American woman spends 30 years trying to avoid pregnancy, and the overwhelming majority (98 percent) of sexually-experienced women has used at least one contraceptive method. Promoting both personal responsibility and responsible policies that make effective family planning affordable and easily accessible, whether through private insurance or safety-net clinics including college health centers, is essential to reducing the high levels of unplanned pregnancy in this country. For more information, see [Policy Brief: Restoring Affordable Birth Control](#).
- **Integrate prevention of teen and unplanned pregnancy in initiatives to reduce poverty, improve educational outcomes, and strengthen families.** Too often, issues of pregnancy planning and prevention are segregated from important policy initiatives to improve child and family well-being, strengthen families, reduce poverty, and improve education and workforce preparation. There is compelling evidence that helping young women and men better plan and prepare for the

responsibilities of parenting will improve outcomes for this generation and the next on a host of measures. For more information, see [The Link between Poverty and Unplanned Pregnancy](#).

- **Strengthen data collection and knowledge on pregnancy and childbearing.** Although birth data is generally accessible, comparable data on sexual activity, contraceptive use, pregnancy, and abortion are more difficult to obtain, are collected episodically, and tend to become available years after they are collected. These data are absolutely essential to track progress at the national and state level, identify disparities among different segments of the population, and inform the public, policy-makers, practitioners and the media about teen and unplanned pregnancy and to mobilize evidence-based action. Comparable data on sexual activity, contraceptive use, pregnancy, and abortion are more difficult to obtain, are collected episodically, and tend to become available years after they are collected. Additionally, only 38 states and New York City collect data about unplanned pregnancy in their state or community, making it challenging to determine progress and needs at the state level.