

# Briefly...

## 2010 Federal Policy Agenda

### About The National Campaign

The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy 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 less poverty, a better educated and prepared workforce, healthier children and families, and lower health care costs. Less unplanned pregnancy also means few abortions—a fact that should help those on both sides of the abortion debate find common ground.

### The Facts

- The United States still has the highest teen pregnancy and birth rates in the industrialized world. Three in ten teen girls in the United States become pregnant at least once by age 20, resulting in well over 400,000 teen births each year.
- In spite of extraordinary progress in reducing teen pregnancy (down 37 percent since the early 1990s), recent data suggest that this trend may be reversing: teen pregnancy rates increased three percent between 2005 and 2006—the first increase in the national teen pregnancy rate since 1990.
- 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 seven in ten pregnancies among unmarried women in their 20s are unplanned (1.1 million annually).
- Overall, half of all pregnancies in the United States are reported by women themselves to be unplanned (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.

## Why It Matters

Now more than ever, it is important to intensify efforts to reduce teen and unplanned pregnancy, particularly as the nation focuses on improving health, improving school completion and workforce competitiveness, reducing poverty, and strengthening families. Teen and unplanned pregnancy are linked to a number of burdensome health and social issues for both parents and children:

- **Health:** Women experiencing a teen or unplanned pregnancy are less likely to obtain early prenatal care. The risks of low birth weight and infant mortality are greater for those babies born to women who have experienced a teen and/or unplanned pregnancy.
- **Education:** Too-early parenthood is a leading cause of school drop out among teen girls—30 percent of teen girls cite pregnancy or parenthood as a reason for dropping out of high school. In addition, 61 percent of women who have children after enrolling in community college fail to finish their degree—65 percent higher than the rate for those who didn't have children.
- **Poverty:** A child's chance of growing up in poverty is nine times greater if the mother gave birth as a teen, if the parents were unmarried when the child was born, and if the mother did not receive a high school diploma than if none of these circumstances are present. Similarly, many unplanned pregnancies to single women result in non-marital births, which increases the chances of poverty for both mother and child.
- **Family Turmoil:** Births resulting from unplanned pregnancies lead to higher levels of chaos and relationship turmoil between the parents and within the family. In addition, parents who have an unplanned birth are more likely to be outside of a committed relationship, less likely to move into a more formal union with the other parent, and more likely to experience unstable relationships during the first 24 months after their child is born, compared to parents having a planned birth.

## Important Policy Opportunities to Make Progress

There are many different ways to reduce both teen and unplanned pregnancy at the individual and societal level and public policy certainly plays a key role. An overarching theme of The National Campaign's public policy recommendations is 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 young women and men 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 completing education, building a strong workforce, and strengthening our economy. Towards these ends, The National Campaign recommends the following:

- **Improve access to family planning services.** The CDC lists family planning as one of the ten greatest public health advances of the 20th century—an achievement that has allowed women, in particular, to participate fully in education and work. As a result of health reform, more men and women will have access to contraceptive services and supplies, but there are still important opportunities ahead to strengthen access and affordability. Policymakers should consider:
  - Increasing resources for the Title X family planning program in the FY11 appropriations process.
  - Ensuring that the Health Resources and Services Administration designates family planning as a women's preventive service so that it receives the same cost-sharing protections as other preventive services required in essential benefit packages.
  - Ensuring that home visiting programs include opportunities to provide information about and referrals for pregnancy planning and prevention.
  - Removing any barriers that may prevent states from selecting the new Medicaid Family Planning optional plan amendment.

- Continue providing states and communities with the flexibility and funding to put in place evidence-based interventions to reduce teen pregnancy.** A growing number of programs have been proven to delay sexual activity, improve contraceptive use, and/or prevent teen pregnancy. New discretionary funds approved for FY 2010 have set the stage for a major federal investment in such programs, while also supporting research and innovation. In addition, mandatory funding for Personal Responsibility Education approved in health reform will provide states, territories, and tribes a stable source of funding for evidence-based strategies that help young people avoid teen pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections and prepare for adulthood. Given the nation's stubbornly high rates of teen pregnancy and births, federal investments are needed to replicate effective programs to serve more teens and develop and test additional approaches, including interventions for vulnerable or underserved populations. Policymakers should consider:

  - Increasing discretionary funding for evidence-based teen pregnancy prevention in the FY11 appropriations process.
  - Providing guidance that strengthens evidence standards and flexibility for states that accept the Title V mandatory abstinence-only funding.
  - Ensuring the best use of the new Personal Responsibility Education funds by providing technical assistance to states, tribes, and territories receiving the grants.
  - Focusing additional research and demonstration funding on the development of evidence-based programs that address disproportionately high rates of teen pregnancy in such vulnerable populations as foster care youth and communities of color.
- 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, community colleges, job training/workforce programs, juvenile justice/criminal justice/re-entry programs, responsible fatherhood and parenting programs, and the military.
- Incorporate family formation discussions into social service programs that focus on self sufficiency and family strengthening.** Seventy percent of all unplanned pregnancies among unmarried 20-somethings are not first pregnancies. A number of 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. These programs include Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, home visiting programs, responsible fatherhood and marriage programs, Head Start, Early Head Start, and Promise Neighborhoods. Policymakers should consider:

  - Encouraging discussions of pregnancy prevention and planning within existing program guidelines and standards.
- Include preventing teen and unplanned pregnancy as a key strategy for improving school retention and completion in both secondary schools and such postsecondary institutions as community colleges.** Teen and unplanned pregnancy can often derail a student's ability to succeed, yet prevention is not typically identified as a high priority by education leaders. Given the current national focus on dropout prevention, more attention should be paid to helping students delay pregnancy as a means to improve school achievement and completion. Policymakers should consider:

  - Providing 2-year and 4-year colleges with flexibility and encouragement to address unplanned pregnancy prevention—including delaying additional children for those who are already parents—as a way encourage educational success. This includes investing in research about effective approaches for college students.
  - Recognizing teen pregnancy prevention as an important component of any dropout prevention strategy in high schools.

- **Incorporate family formation discussions into workforce and training programs.** Similar to education, an early or unplanned pregnancy can interfere with the ability of young women and men to get the skills they need for the 21st Century workforce. Workforce initiatives should incorporate discussion of pregnancy prevention and planning as a strategy to help young people avoid unplanned pregnancy in the first place and help those who are already parents avoid a subsequent unplanned pregnancy. Policymakers should consider:
  - Exploring opportunities in the FY 2011 appropriations process and Workforce Investment Act reauthorization to address healthy relationships and pregnancy prevention and planning in employment and training programs that serve large numbers of teens and young adults, such as Youth Build, the Youth Innovation Fund, Job Corps, Transitional Jobs, and Reintegration of Ex-Offenders.
- **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. Policymakers should consider:
  - Investing in a variety of innovative and user-friendly resources to help parents communicate their values on sex, love, and relationships to 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. Lawmakers have harnessed the power of the media for other important public health goals by funding various public service and communication campaigns. Policymakers should consider:
  - Using both traditional media and the exploding world of digital media to communicate the foundational idea that starting families and raising children are among the most important tasks any of us undertake, and they need to be approached with care, thought and deep awareness of what's at stake. Digital media also holds tremendous potential for providing user-friendly information and support to improve the careful, consistent use of effective contraception, especially among young adults.
- **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 additional resources to help reach the goal of funding the National Center for Health Statistics at \$175 million by FY13 and to bring the remaining states into the Pregnancy Risk Assessment Monitoring System (PRAMS).