

Briefly...

Policy Brief: Thoughts for Elected Officials About Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy

Teen pregnancy has been front and center on the nation's radar screen for some time now. The movie *Juno*, the pregnancy of teen TV star Jamie Lynn Spears, and the pregnancy of Sarah Palin's seventeen-year old daughter Bristol all garnered headlines, as did the announcement from CDC in late 2007 that the teen birth rate in the United States increased for the first time in 15 years.

While this spotlight has prompted a much-needed national conversation about teen pregnancy, the sobering news about—and fascination with—teen pregnancy masks three key ideas. First, few Americans understand that it's not just teens that are having difficulty with pregnancy planning and prevention. In fact, at present, half of all pregnancies in the nation are unplanned and the majority are to adults not teens. Second, the decades-long argument over abortion has dominated the political debate at the expense of basic understanding of, and support for, contraception, which plays a critical role in helping those who are sexually active avoid unplanned pregnancy in the first place. Third, we have lost sight of the simple fact that when unplanned pregnancy is reduced so is abortion. Less unplanned pregnancy means fewer abortions—a fact that should help those on both sides of the abortion debate find common ground. Reducing unplanned pregnancy will also mean less poverty, a better educated and prepared workforce, healthier children and families, and lower health care costs.

As newly-elected officials at the national, state and local level prepare to take office, The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy poses a few questions and offers some key data for elected officials at all levels to consider. We hope it sparks a new conversation and inspires new action about these important issues.

Key Questions:

- What should be done to help young adults be more successful in pregnancy planning and prevention? Please note that seven in ten pregnancies among single women in their 20s are unplanned.
- Do you agree that helping women avoid unplanned pregnancy will lead to fewer abortions?
- Do you believe that providing access to good family planning services is an important aspect of basic health care?
- Do you support federal funding for family planning? Would you support increased investments in programs to help reduce unplanned pregnancy and provide individuals access to a full range of effective contraceptive services that meet their needs?
- Do you support steps to improve private health insurance coverage so more individuals have access to a full range of effective contraceptive services?
- Do you believe that any effort to revise or strengthen the health care system should protect and enhance family planning services?
- Do you believe men should play an increased role in preventing unplanned pregnancy?

- Beyond government programs, what else can be done by various groups to reduce the high levels of unplanned pregnancy in our nation? What should be the role of individuals? Faith communities? Community organizations? The media? Employers? The private sector?

Key Data

- Of the three million unplanned pregnancies in a given year, 45 percent result in a live birth, 42 percent end in abortion, and 14 percent result in a miscarriage. While there are no comparable numbers for how many women experiencing an unplanned pregnancy choose adoption, available data suggest the percentage is very small—less than two percent of unmarried mothers chose adoption in 2002.
- Most unplanned pregnancies (77 percent) and most abortions (83 percent) occur to women 20 and older.
- Contraception is widely used. In fact, 98 percent of sexually experienced women have used at least one contraceptive method.
- Fully 88 percent of voters support women’s access to contraception.
- Contraceptive services provided at publicly funded clinics helped women avoid 1.4 million unplanned pregnancies in 2004 alone, which would likely have resulted in about 640,000 births and 600,000 abortions.

For more information, please visit: www.thenationalcampaign.org/resources.

About the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy

About the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy: The National Campaign’s goal 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 is to prevent teen pregnancy and unplanned pregnancy among single, young adults. 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 are successful, child and family well-being will improve. There will be less poverty, more opportunities for young men and women to complete their education or achieve other life goals, fewer abortions, and a stronger nation.