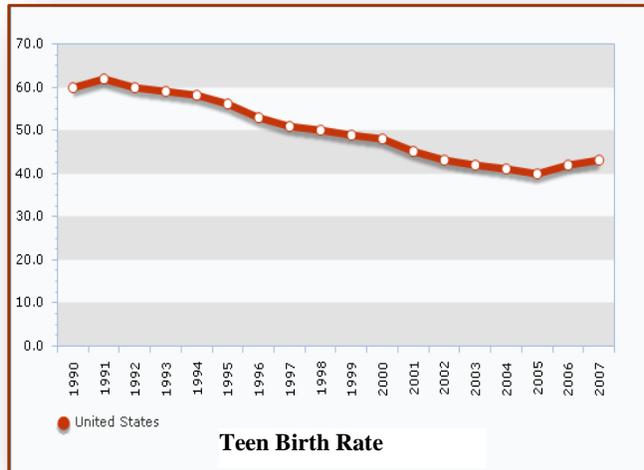


REDUCING TEEN PREGNANCIES SAVES PUBLIC DOLLARS AND PROMOTES YOUNG ADULTS' ECONOMIC FUTURES

In difficult economic times, elected officials need reliable, cost-effective approaches that improve the lives of children and families. Outlined below are several budget-conscious solutions that improve the potential prosperity of families and save taxpayer dollars now and in the future.



Teen childbearing in the United States costs taxpayers at least [\\$9.1 billion](#) annually. Most expenditures come from negative consequences for children born to teen mothers, including increased health care, foster care, and incarceration. Currently, 3 in 10 girls in the U.S. get pregnant by age 20, the [highest teen birth rate](#) in the industrialized world. The rate experienced a steep decline in the 1990's which leveled off in recent years and increased by 5 percent between 2005 and 2007. Reducing teen pregnancies saves public dollars. For example, the decline in teen childbearing between 1991 and 2004 saved taxpayers \$6.7 billion in 2004 alone. An [effective response](#) to the problem of teen pregnancy includes investments in proven interventions, efforts to inform and empower

parents of teens and other adults and focused attention on vulnerable subgroups of teens, such as those in foster care.

Responsible, Budget Conscious Policies

- **Inform and support parents of teens.** Teens consistently [report](#) that their parents most influence their decisions about sex. Open communication between parents and their children, shared activities, parental presence in the home and parental caring and concern are all associated with a reduced risk of early sex and teen pregnancy. [Michigan](#)'s Talk Early & Talk Often program supports parents of middle school children to encourage communication about abstinence and sexuality. A survey following the program found that parents were more confident and more likely to discuss sexuality with their children. [Utah](#) piloted a Spanish language version of the evidence-based [Parents Matter](#) program for parents of 9- to -12-year-olds, which is associated with decreased sexual risk-taking behavior among adolescents.
- **Support Public Awareness Campaigns.** [North Carolina](#) conducted and [evaluated](#) a successful mass media campaign using television and radio public service announcements (PSAs), billboards and city bus signs, which resulted in more parents talking with their adolescent children about sex.
- **Use the bully pulpit to raise public awareness.** [New Mexico](#) proclaimed May as "Teen Pregnancy Prevention Month" in support of [Challenge 2010](#), a joint effort by the state department of health and the New Mexico Teen Pregnancy Coalition to reduce the teen birth rate in New Mexico by 15 percent by 2010.

- **Enlist two- and four-year colleges as partners in pregnancy prevention efforts.** Retention is a serious issue for higher education, and among young women, unplanned pregnancy is a significant obstacle to college completion. [Studies](#) show that sixty-one percent of women who have children after enrolling in community college fail to finish their degree, which is 65 percent higher than the rate for those who do not have children. Community colleges are [piloting](#) strategies to improve college completion through the reduction of unplanned pregnancies. State policymakers can [partner](#) with college leadership to include sexual health information and services in course offerings, student resources, and campus dialogues. This is currently being done in [Maryland](#).
- **Link teen and unplanned pregnancies to other high priority issues,** such as infant mortality, high school dropout, college completion, child welfare, youth development, poverty or early childhood development. [Indiana](#) included reducing unplanned pregnancy as an area of focus in a call to action to improve outcomes for infants and families. The plan included recommendations for all facets of the Indiana community, from parents and schools to health care providers and state agencies, with a multi-year [evaluation](#) component.
- **Focus interventions on teens in foster care.** [Research](#) has demonstrated that teen girls in foster care are at 2.5 times greater risk of pregnancy by age 19 than those not in foster care. And approximately 50 percent of 21-year-old men aging out of foster care report they had gotten someone pregnant, compared to 19 percent of their peers who were not in the system. It is estimated that teen childbearing cost the child welfare system at least \$2.3 billion nationally in 2004 alone. A number of [states](#) are beginning to focus interventions on teens in foster care. [Virginia](#), with support from the federal [Centers for Disease Control \(CDC\)](#), formed a three-year partnership with state and municipal departments of health and social services to encourage healthy sexual behaviors and prevent teen pregnancies among youth in or transitioning out of the foster care system. Strategies include training for social workers, group home directors and foster parents.
- **Maximize federal funds.** Federal health care reform offers new funding opportunities, including the [Personal Responsibility Education program](#) (state formula grants) and the [Teen Pregnancy Prevention Initiative](#) (competitive grants to public and private entities). Medicaid and Title X are two other significant funding sources, but states can also use flexible funding such as the Maternal and Child Health, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), and Social Services block grants. [Georgia](#) uses TANF to support Teen Centers that provide comprehensive health services to youth at risk of pregnancy and STDs. These services are delivered in local health departments or in alternative “teen friendly” settings with afternoon, evening and weekend hours.
- **Leverage private funding.** In [New Mexico](#), the Plain Talk/Hablando Claro program is funded through a combination of Medicaid dollars and private donations from Unidos, a collaborative fund of multiple New Mexico foundations that have pooled their resources to address teen pregnancy in their communities. The Annie E. Casey Foundation supported the development and replication of the [Plain Talk/Hablando Claro](#) program, which reduced pregnancy among participants, throughout the country.

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