

Briefly...

Responding to the Increase in the Teen Birth Rate: What Communities Can Do

The United States has made extraordinary progress in reducing rates of teen pregnancy and birth. Since the early 1990s, the teen pregnancy rate has declined 38 percent and the teen birth rate has declined 32%. In fact, few social problems have improved quite as dramatically over the past decade plus.

The most recent news on this front, however, has not been positive. In January 2009, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) confirmed that the teen birth rate had increased three percent between 2005 and 2006—the first increase after 14 years of steady decline. In June 2008, CDC reported that the declines in high school teens' sexual activity and increases in contraceptive use that began in the early 1990s had essentially flattened out between 2005 and 2007.

The discouraging trends in teen sex and contraceptive use, as well as the rise in the teen birth rate, may, however, have a modest silver lining: these developments provide those concerned about early pregnancy and childbearing a fresh opportunity to make their case to policymakers, the press, parents, and practitioners. Below are several ideas on how to capitalize on the recent sobering news.

- **First up.** Never miss a chance to mention the increase in the national teen birth rate when speaking with policymakers, the media, or program providers. Trend data—particularly data heading in the wrong direction—tend to ratchet up a sense of urgency and galvanize attention.

Visit http://www.thenationalcampaign.org/resources/birthrate_rise.aspx for background information on the increase in the teen birth rate.

- **Wallet and pocketbook issues.** Remind policymakers, community leaders, business leaders and others of the

significant public costs associated with teen childbearing. Taxpayers shoulder a significant financial burden for teen childbearing through increased public health care, child welfare, and criminal justice costs. Teen childbearing also has a significant impact on the amount of tax revenues available to support public policy priorities. Let those not traditionally focused on efforts to prevent teen pregnancy know how early pregnancy and childbearing affect their bottom lines. For example, foster care organizations should be interested in teen pregnancy—not only are youth in foster care at greater risk for early pregnancy, but teen births are costly to the child welfare system as well. Again, urge policymakers to invest in teen pregnancy prevention programs—bringing down rates of teen pregnancy will save money; an especially important consideration in the current budget environment.

Visit <http://www.thenationalcampaign.org/costs> to find the costs for your state or use our online calculator to estimate the costs of teen childbearing in your neighborhood, zip code, or congressional district.

- **Action item.** Use the increase in the teen birth rate as a call to action. Consider holding a town hall meeting on teen pregnancy, in order to give teens, parents, policymakers, and others the opportunity to voice their opinion. Remember to include people not ordinarily aligned with efforts to prevent teen pregnancy—business leaders and faith communities, for example—and make them aware of the role they can play in helping reduce teen and unplanned pregnancy. Also, reach out to groups focused on issues such as child welfare and poverty reduction to explain how teen pregnancy affects their issues and enlist them as allies.

Visit <http://www.thenationalcampaign.org> for resources and ideas for states and communities, visit <http://www.thenationalcampaign.org/religion> for ideas for working with the faith community, visit for <http://www.thenationalcampaign.org/fostercare> for ideas on working with foster care youth and providers, and visit http://www.thenationalcampaign.org/espanol/default_eng.aspx for ideas and resources for working with Latino youth and parents.

- **Local, local, local.** New state specific teen birth data was released by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's National Center for Health Statistics on January 7, 2009. Write a press release, op-ed, and/or letter to the editor about your state's trends. Use the state data section of the National Campaign's website to compare your state to others.

Visit <http://www.thenationalcampaign.org/state-data> for a wealth of state data and visit http://www.thenationalcampaign.org/resources/pdf/Funding_for_Effective_TPP_Interventions.pdf and http://www.thenationalcampaign.org/resources/pdf/Briefly_TPPP_Funding_Sources.pdf for information on funding for teen pregnancy prevention programs.

- **Invest in what works.** A growing number of sex education programs that support both abstinence and the use of contraception for sexually active teens—and some that mention sex little or not at all—have now shown positive effects in delaying first intercourse, improving contraceptive use,

and preventing pregnancy or sexually transmitted disease among teens. When choosing an intervention or program, communities should strongly consider those that have evidence of success. And ask your elected officials to invest in teen pregnancy prevention programs that work.

Please visit http://www.thenationalcampaign.org/ea2007/positive_impact.pdf for a list of 15 programs with strong evidence of success, and visit <http://www.thenationalcampaign.org/resources/works/PWWTWabout.aspx> for more information on "what works."

- **Meet the press.** Meet with your newspaper's editorial board to discuss the national increase in the teen birth rate, the rates in your state, and what you think needs to happen to reverse troubling trends in your community. Again, also consider writing an op-ed and/or letter to the editor.

Visit <http://www.thenationalcampaign.org/media/press.aspx> to see relevant National Campaign press releases.

- **Have a goal.** Set a statewide or local goal to reduce teen pregnancy. Use this goal to focus attention on teen pregnancy and to start a conversation about what it will take to reduce the rates in your state.

Visit <http://www.thenationalcampaign.org/sla/goals.aspx> for more information on The National Campaign's teen pregnancy reduction goal and state goals.