

No Time for Complacency:

Teen Births in California's 7th Senate District

Senate District 7

The 7th senate district includes part of Contra Costa County. Tom Torlakson (D) represents the district; he was elected for a four-year term in 2000.

The Problem

The Public Health Institute's Center for Research on Adolescent Health and Development analyzed teen births and birthrates in California's state senate districts. Results show that in the 7th Senate District:

- 645 teen births occurred in this district in year 2000.
- More than 2 percent of all female teens aged 15–19 in the district, or 1 out of every 40, gave birth in year 2000.
- The district's birthrate of 25 births per thousand teen women was lower than the overall California and US rates (45 per thousand), but higher than the rates for most industrialized countries, including Japan (4), Netherlands (6), Italy (7), France (10), Germany (13), and Ireland (15).
- Every year, the total costs to society for teen births in the 7th Senate District are \$40 million.
- Every year, the total costs to society for teen births across California are \$3.3 billion.

The Consequences

- Teens who become mothers on average have lower levels of educational attainment and high school completion, more single parenthood, and less stable employment than those who postpone childbirth.
- Teen mothers tend to experience more pregnancy-related problems and have less healthy infants.
- Pregnant teens are more likely to smoke during pregnancy.
- Preschool children of teen mothers tend to show delay of cognitive development as well as more behavior problems and more aggressive behavior.
- Adolescent children of teen mothers experience higher rates of grade failure, delinquency, and early sexual activity.

- Children of teen mothers are more likely to experience abuse and neglect, and to be placed in foster care.
- Fathers to children of teen mothers tend to achieve less education and lower earnings over time.

What Can Be Done

All levels of government are facing unprecedented challenges that are forcing them to examine their priorities. At this time, the prevention of births to teen mothers is more important than ever. The Public Health Institute and the Center for Research on Adolescent Health and Development recommend that:

- At a minimum, all current program funding aimed at reducing teen pregnancies and births must be maintained.
- California continue to decline participation in and contribution of matching funds for the federal abstinence-only-until-marriage education program.
- California continue to fund effective school- and community-based programs that provide education, outreach, and services to support teens in delaying childbearing.
- Elected officials step up to the plate and initiate community dialogues by bringing together parents, adolescents, and other school and community stakeholders to address the issue of high teen birth rates and to determine what additional steps can be taken.
- California provide for enforcement of existing education standards that require medically accurate information to be taught in school-based sexuality education programs.
- California revise and strengthen California Education Code to clarify and consolidate the minimal standards for comprehensive sexuality education instruction.
- California begin discussion and development of a legislative mandate for California public middle schools, high schools, and alternative schools to teach research-based comprehensive sexuality education.
- California support reliable and complete school-based survey research that will elicit scientific understanding of teen health risk behaviors, including sexual risk behaviors.
- Schools and communities provide multi-level comprehensive sexuality education and youth development programs, with school, parent, youth, and community components working in synergy.
- Schools and communities review and monitor school policies and curricula to assess compliance with California Education Code, and to bring these policies and curricula into compliance as necessary.

For background, methodology, references, detailed policy recommendations, and additional information on teen births in California, including copies of the executive summary and full report titled *No Time for Complacency: Teen Births in California*, please visit <http://crahd.phi.org>