

## Policy Recommendations

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. Investments in this area are productive for their immediate payoff in terms of decreased health care costs as well as their contribution to the stability of the social fabric and to California's economic future. In this light, the Public Health Institute and the Center for Research on Adolescent Health and Development provide the following recommendations in the areas of leadership, programs, educational policy, and schools and communities. A more detailed set of specific recommendations is provided in Appendix A.

### Programs

- At a minimum, all 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.

### Leadership

- 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.

### Educational Policy

- 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

- 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.

## Appendix A. Detailed Policy Recommendations

### State Government

- Continue to decline California's participation in and contribution of matching funds for the federal abstinence-only education program.
- Begin discussion and development of a legislative mandate for California public middle, high, and alternative schools to teach research-based age-appropriate comprehensive sexuality education.
- Restore funding to 1999 levels for the California Department of Health Services, Office of Family Planning, programs including (1) the Public Outreach and Media Campaign; and (2) Information and Education local assistance projects.
- Restore funding to 1999 levels for the California Department of Education's Teen Pregnancy Prevention Grant Program, and HIV/STD Prevention Program.
- Expand the Family PACT provider network to reflect population growth and demographic changes, as well as anticipated increases in the poverty rate.
- Provide funding for expanded marketing and outreach of Family Pact to teens.
- Allocate funding to the California Department of Education for monitoring compliance of school districts with California Education Code related to sexuality education.
- For school-based health behavior surveys in California, allow parental notification and the opportunity to decline participation in place of requiring written parental consent.
- For school-based health behavior surveys in California, especially at the statewide representative sample level, provide for collection of anonymous self-reported sexual risk behavior data from high school and alternative school students at the level of detail found in the federally sponsored Youth Risk Behavior Survey. Currently, California is one of the few states that does not provide these data, thereby placing it at a disadvantage in monitoring changes and trends in these behaviors and evaluating effectiveness of statewide programs
- Revise and strengthen California Education Code to clarify and consolidate the minimal standards for comprehensive sexuality education instruction in kindergarten and grades 1 to 12, and for mandated HIV/AIDS prevention education for all pupils in grades 7 to 12.
- Maintain funding for the California Healthy Kids Resource Center to review and disseminate effective research-based sexuality education programs.
- Continue funding for After School Education, Healthy Start, and other research-based youth development programs.

## California Philanthropic Foundations

- Continue to fund community programs, policy analysis and advocacy, media campaigns, leadership development, and surveys, evaluation, and other research in support of teen pregnancy prevention in California.
- Fund a consensus process by a respected California public health organization for development and promotion of recommended guidelines for school-based sexuality education in California. These standards should be consistent with existing national guidelines developed by the *National Commission on Adolescent Sexual Health* and the *National Sexuality Education Guidelines Task Force*, while at the same time specifically sensitive to California's demographics, local concerns, and other unique needs.
- Fund new research to investigate the challenges in generating and effectively employing community support for school-based comprehensive sexuality education.
- Fund new research to further investigate California's successes relative to other states, and the causes, correlates, and consequences of these successes.

## 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.
- Provide multi-level comprehensive sexuality education and youth development programs, with school, parent, youth, and community components working in synergy. Include research-based best practice programs and curricula, such as those provided by the California Healthy Kids Resource Center.
- Review, discuss, and endorse the National Commission on Adolescent Sexual Health (1995) consensus statement (see Appendix B). This statement has been endorsed by more than 50 national organizations, including the American Medical Association, the American School Health Association, the Society for Adolescent Medicine, the Child Welfare League of America, and the YWCA. Determine if school and community policies and programs are consistent with this statement.
- Provide specialized training for all sexuality education classroom instructors.
- Conduct surveys of local schools and districts to determine and evaluate district sexuality education policies and practices.
- Conduct surveys to investigate attitudes, beliefs, and concerns of parents, adolescents, and other school and community stakeholders regarding adolescents' healthy sexual development and risk behavior prevention needs, and potential strategies to meet these needs.
- Educate parents, adolescents, and other school and community stakeholders about the benefits of research-based comprehensive sexuality education and the views of the community.
- Train and support youth to advocate for research-based comprehensive sexuality education. Include topics such as advocacy, working with the media, and the importance of using data to support advocacy efforts.