

3 Ensuring Access to Family Planning and Contraceptive Equity

Latinas, who have the highest fertility and birth rates of any group, account for 18.6% of U.S. births.ⁱ Approximately 50% of all pregnancies to Latinas are unintended. It is estimated that 17-20% of all abortions in the U.S. are by Latinas.ⁱⁱ Although statistics show that Latina teen pregnancy is declining, it is doing so at a much slower rate compared to other ethnic groups and in fact may be increasing in states where there are new influxes of Latina immigrants.ⁱⁱⁱ The 2002 National Survey of Family Growth (NSFG) indicated that only 39.7% of Latinas aged 15-44 reported visiting a family planning provider within the prior twelve month period.^{iv} The NSFG also indicated that Latinas had the highest risk of having a teen birth, with 35% of Latinas having their first child before the age of 20 compared with 12% for white and 27% for black teens.^v Furthermore, only 55.6% of Latinas between the ages of 15 and 44 reported using the pill or a condom during sexual intercourse. Of the sexually active Latinas aged 15-19 surveyed, only 37% used the pill, compared to 68% white and 55% black teens and only 83% used condoms, while 96% and 95% white and black teen used condoms, respectively. Such stark statistical differences^{vi} highlight the need to increase access to family planning and contraception for Latinas.

The current policy of abstinence-only sex education programs only exacerbates the access disparities for Latinas. Abstinence-only sex education programs omit essential information in the types and variety of contraception methods available to Latinas. Without knowledge of and access to available contraception methods, the rate of unintended pregnancies will continue to rise. Comprehensive sex education programs that address contraception methods, family planning and sexuality would better equip young Latinas in making positive and healthy choices about their sexuality, bodies and sexual relationships.

One of the options that must be made fully available to Latinas is emergency contraception (EC), especially over-the-counter (OTC) emergency contraception. EC can help reduce the number of abortions and sterilizations and enable Latinas to exercise a greater level of reproductive freedom. Although the 2006 FDA approval of EC OTC was a step forward, new challenges for Latina access were created with the FDA approval. EC OTC can only be purchased by an adult who is 18 years old and can prove this with a government-issued I.D. The age restriction and the government-issued I.D. will pose obstacles to access for women under 18, low-income women, and undocumented immigrant women.

To increase access to family planning and contraception for Latinas, the following recommendations are offered:

Policy Recommendations

- ☑ Federal and State Funding for Family Planning Public Education
 - Federal and state funding should be allocated toward a public education campaign on family planning and contraception aimed at both men and women of the Latino community.
- ☑ Federal and State Funding for Family Planning Services
 - Fund initiatives to increase access to free and low cost family planning services for uninsured and underinsured Latinas.
- ☑ Medicaid Coverage for Emergency Contraception
 - Ensure Medicaid coverage for emergency contraception in all states.
- ☑ Emergency Contraception for Sexual Assault Victims
 - Support local and statewide campaigns to fight the refusal to administer emergency contraception to sexual assault victims in religiously-affiliated healthcare institutions.

ⁱ Good Intentions are Not Enough! Latino Health Disparities and Barriers to Health Care Access, *available at* <http://www.latinoaids.org/misc/goodintentions.pdf>

ⁱⁱ Guttmacher Institute

ⁱⁱⁱ Erika Johanna Vexler and Katherine Suellentrop, Turner Foundation and the National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, *Bridging Two Worlds: How Teen Pregnancy Prevention Programs Can Better Serve Latino Youth*, January 2006, *available at* http://www.teenpregnancy.org/resources/reading/pdf/Bridging_Two_Worlds.pdf

^{iv} The National Survey of Family Growth (Cycle 6) 2002 (December 2005), *available at* http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/series/sr_23/sr23_024.pdf,

^v *Id.*

^{vi} *Id.*