Children's Hospital of Philadelphia
PolicyLab

Preventing Adolescent Pregnancy in Pennsylvania through Long-Acting Reversible Contraceptives

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Unintended pregnancy and abortion rates are higher in the United States than in most other developed countries. The problem of unintended pregnancy disproportionately affects adolescent women. Almost half (49%) of all pregnancies in the United States, and 80-90% among adolescent and young women ages 15 to 24, are unintended. The direct cause of teen pregnancies, the majority of which are to young women 17 or older, is the lack of consistent and correct use of effective contraception. Unintended pregnancy can have a negative impact not only on the lives of the teens and young women, but also on their parents and their children. Moreover, the public costs of teen childbearing, which reached $9.4 billion in 2010, are a significant cause for concern.

Although almost all sexually active adolescents report using some method of contraception, the most effective methods are rarely selected. Instead, adolescents most commonly use methods like withdrawal, condoms, oral contraceptive pills, contraceptive patch, the vaginal ring, and hormone injections, all of which have a relatively high discontinuation rate and failure rate when used inconsistently and incorrectly. Therefore, even adolescents who are acting to prevent pregnancy may find themselves pregnant due to the failure of their chosen birth control method. Long-acting reversible contraception (LARC) methods are up to twenty times more effective than oral contraceptive pills, according to research from 2012 involving more than 7,000 women.

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