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Technical questions:

Coalition releases statewide plan to improve youth sexual health

Oregon Youth Sexual Health Plan provides resource for communities

Today a coalition of government and community partners announced the release of the Oregon Youth Sexual Health Plan, a framework for improving the sexual health of youth in Oregon.

The new State Plan was coordinated by the statewide Teen Pregnancy Prevention/Adolescent Sexual Health Partnership (TPP/SHP), a coalition of state, county and community advocates and non-profit organizations. TPP/SHP is an on-going collaboration begun in 1994 with the support of the Governor's Office to address the incidence and impacts of teen pregnancy.

The sexual health plan is a holistic action plan to address all aspects of youth sexual health, in addition to efforts specific to teen pregnancy prevention.

"It's a new approach, actively involving youth to create a plan to define their needs, and identify programs and policies that meet those needs," says Mary Gossart of Planned Parenthood of Southwestern Oregon, and member of TPP/SHP. "It means looking at youth as a resource, not as a problem."

Many Oregon communities have identified youth sexual health issues as a priority – including interrelated problems of rising rates of unintended pregnancies, sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), inequities in access to health care, relationship violence, high rates of school drop-outs, and increased risk of long-term poverty, particularly among youth of color.

The main goals of the plan include:

- Providing youth with accurate information and skills to make healthy choices for themselves;
- Partnering with young people to develop effective programs and policies that affect the health and safety of Oregon youth;
- Eliminating disparate rates of unplanned pregnancy and sexually transmitted infection by ensuring access to health care for all youth and community members;
- Reducing rates of unintended teen pregnancy and STDs;
- Reducing non-consensual sexual behaviors, including dating and sexual violence.

“Oregonians have a wide range of views about the most effective way to approach youth sexuality,” says Jessica Duke, Adolescent Sexual Health Program Coordinator with the Oregon Public Health Division and TPP/SHP member. “Instead of imposing outside priorities; the plan was developed by communities so they can work on these important issues in a way that is appropriate for their community.”

The plan provides a resource for communities to identify effective strategies, collaborate with local partners, and find the latest research and language that can be used to seek grants and other resources for new and existing programs. The plan is built on a strong foundation of scientific evidence, incorporating findings of current health and child development research, original community, youth and parent surveys, and youth research, and feedback from community forums with hundreds of participants.

“Coordinating our efforts and aligning them with best practices is especially important in an era of tight budgets,” says Gossart. “It’s a more efficient use of very limited resources. Some strategies within the plan can be implemented even without new resources, and are already in process. This will get everyone within communities and around the state working together using a common framework and consistent messages.”

The Oregon Youth Sexual Health Plan has been posted on the Pregnancy Prevention Web site: <http://egov.oregon.gov/DHS/children/teens/tpp/>

Members of the coalition are also available for technical support.

TPP/SHP members include representatives of:

The Oregon Commission for Children and Families

Oregon Department of Education

Oregon Department of Human Services:

Public Health Division
Children, Adults and Families Division
AmeriCorps HOPE
Oregon Teen Pregnancy Task Force
Planned Parenthood - Columbia Willamette
Planned Parenthood - Southwestern Oregon
Benton County Health Department
Jackson County Health Department
Multnomah County Health Department