

Executive Summary



The vision of the Texas Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy is **for every Texas teen to have the information and resources needed to avoid unintended pregnancy**. We know that some youth in our state do have access to information and resources, but a further examination of teen birth rates and other adolescent health trends highlight an undeniable truth: information, resources, and opportunities are not equitably distributed in Texas.

Far too many young people in the Lone Star State—especially those who are economically disadvantaged or marginalized—face barriers to basic education about human reproduction and sexuality and accessing contraception. As a result, Texas is one of a number of states where decreases in the teen birth rates have lagged behind the rest of the country; **Texas has the 9th highest teen birth rate nationally**; more than 24,000 young women under age 20 become mothers every year; and rates of sexually transmitted infections among young adults are climbing. Even more troubling are the persistent disparities by race, place, and wealth.

ABOUT THIS PROJECT

Declines in the teen birth rate over the last three decades—nationally and in Texas—did not occur by random chance. The efforts of our colleagues in the field to center the needs of youth and amplify their voices; disseminate sexual health information and education; and improve access to clinical services and contraception have undoubtedly played a role. While recognizing this success, we also need to do more to ensure young people have access to age-appropriate, medically accurate, inclusive sexual health education—plus the ability to act on their decisions by accessing contraception. Empowering young Texans to determine whether and when to become parents can help strengthen families, improve child well-being, and support young people in achieving their goals.

Due to the gaps we identified in sexual health outcomes between demographic groups in Texas and our state's persistently disproportional rates of teen births, we sought to dive deeper into these disparities and explore the current landscape of adolescent sexual health in Texas. We wanted to learn more about the perspectives of those closest to this issue—young people, parents, youth-serving professionals, community leaders, advocates, healthcare professionals, educators, and philanthropists.

Along the way, we discovered the big challenges and bright opportunities ahead for Texas.

Much of the project was conducted during a year of compounded crises: the COVID-19 pandemic; a global racial reckoning; a highly charged U.S. election; and a deadly winter storm in Texas. Against the backdrop of these life-altering events, we engaged more than 60 organizations and talked to more than 750 Texans through interviews, listening sessions, and a survey designed specifically for young adults and parents.

KEY CONCLUSIONS

It is 857 miles from Orange to El Paso and the 254 counties in between vary tremendously. Our research captured voices from every corner of the state and **tells an unapologetically Texan story**. In order to best serve the 4.1 million young people between the ages of 10 and 19 in our state, we must recognize the challenges and opportunities ahead, as told through the words of those closest to these issues across the Lone Star State.

ONE. Broaden the conversation.



It became quite common for young people, stakeholders, and service providers alike to push for a broader lens and focus: one that is inclusive of, but not limited to, pregnancy and disease prevention. In addition to stakeholders raising this issue, nationwide, many teen pregnancy prevention groups have shifted their lens—as well as their name—to a more positive framework of supporting reproductive health and overall well-being.

TWO. Focus on the big picture.



In a state the size of Texas, trying to change one person, one school, or even one community at a time can seem overwhelming. We must find ways to support the incredible work happening at the community level across our state with systems-level improvements in policy and practice—especially related to contraceptive access and payer sources. Among the stakeholders and service providers we spoke with, there was clear recognition that opportunities exist to coordinate and enhance public awareness, messaging, and policy work at the state level.

THREE. Bridge the information gap.



Reaching all young people in Texas with the factual information they need to improve their sexual health is a daunting task that requires deploying every available resource. The harsh truth is there are massive gaps in the information that young people have access to and there is an unmistakable disconnect between where parents (and other adults) prefer teens receive this information and where they are actually receiving information. Youth are fully aware that even when information is delivered to them, it often comes with explicit biases and exclusions. As a result, they are turning to their smartphones and friends to access information about love, sex, and relationships.

FOUR. Remove barriers to access.



Expanding affordable access to the full range of contraceptive options—including the most effective, longest-lasting methods—is the single most important thing we can do to ensure young Texans can delay pregnancy until they are ready. When it comes to accessing family planning services for teens and adults alike, there should be no “wrong door.” But there are many wrong doors in Texas, and what’s more, the system is so complex that even many professional experts in the field struggle to help youth navigate their way to the right door.

FIVE. Address systemic inequities.



Given limited resources in communities—both financial and human capital—understanding where and how to focus efforts is critically important. Inequities in access to information, services, and opportunity exist in Texas associated with geography (rural vs. urban), economics (rich vs. poor), and race (White, Black, Hispanic, Asian), among other factors. We know that systemic and institutional barriers and a history of policy decisions in Texas are impediments to progress and are direct contributors to these issues and believe a more inclusive and empowering prevention framework can better address cultural and economic divides.

SIX. Do the hard work. Together.



A number of direct opportunities were identified throughout the full report that will help support those working in communities and with youth themselves. Perhaps most importantly, there is a desire among those we spoke with to have a more strategic approach to securing partnerships, leading to more coordinated and collaborative efforts. Along with this, a greater understanding and appreciation of which approaches should be statewide, and which should be more regionally focused is needed.

★ All research reported is from a Gap Analysis conducted by 1000 Feathers, LLC unless otherwise noted.

★ For more information, visit www.txcampaign.org. or follow us on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter.

