



Illinois Caucus for Adolescent Health

Policy Priorities 2011

The Illinois Caucus for Adolescent Health 2011 Policy Priorities

This document outlines our goals for the year, as we work in partnership with youth and adult allies across Illinois to:

- Increase access to equity of sexuality education in schools and communities State-wide by passing Illinois State Legislation known as the *IL COMPREHENSIVE SEXUAL EDUCATION* State House Bill 3027
- Increase access to and equity of adolescent sexual health care services
- Increase support for pregnant and parenting youth to complete their educational goals, while encouraging strong family engagement and parental support and adult allies who support the decision-making of young persons.

Increasing Access to Sexuality Education

The health of our youth depends on their ability to make informed choices about identity development. Research shows that medically accurate, age appropriate, sexuality education equips youth to make healthy decisions. But, since 1996, Congress has appropriated over \$1.8 billion toward ineffective abstinence-only until marriage programs. Youth have the right to access responsible sexuality education that provides the information, skills, and resources necessary for informed, healthy decision-making.

- **ICAH will support state and federal legislation** that promotes medically accurate, age-appropriate, responsible sexuality education in schools and communities, advocating on behalf of the IL Sex Ed Bill, which was introduced in the Illinois Senate in February 2011, then as SB 1619.
- **ICAH encourages funding for responsible sexuality education** and opposes public investment only in abstinence-only until marriage programs.
- **ICAH engages in grassroots efforts to change local sexuality education policies**, by encouraging school boards to pass and implement sound policies.
- **ICAH maintains an Illinois Youth Policy Council (IYPC)**, a group of youth ages 14 to 20 who implement grassroots strategies to gain community and legislative support for responsible sexuality education. In its fourth year, IYPC will help advocate for the IL Prep Bill.

Increasing Access to Sexual Healthcare

Accessible, affordable, quality sexual health care services are critical to the health and wellbeing of youth. The majority of Americans become sexually active during their adolescence and early adulthood, yet adolescents in Illinois are systematically denied access to appropriate, effective sexually transmitted infection (STI) and HIV prevention, sexuality education, and related health care. Failure to access sexual health services can have serious public health consequences.

Youth must be able to obtain a full range of sexual health services to make healthy, responsible decisions throughout their lifespan. All young people—immigrant, low-income, LGBTQI youth, differently-abled youth and pregnant and parenting youth—deserve access to affordable, quality sexual health care.

- **ICAH encourages condom availability for use of all genders** in schools and communities. Correct, consistent condom use remains the most effective way to prevent the spread of HIV and other STIs among sexually active individuals, and research has shown that availability does not increase sexual activity.
- **ICAH supports the rights of young people to confidentially consent** to reproductive health care, including abortion, without the required notification or consent of a parent or legal guardian.
- **ICAH supports non-prescriptive access to emergency contraception**, a safe and effective method to prevent pregnancy that is currently only available to women 17 and older.

- **ICAH opposes federal legislation that cuts funding for sexual healthcare access.** ICAH will always support budgets for access to healthcare services for young people.
- **ICAH supports the use, availability and affordability of HPV vaccines** to reduce HPV and cervical cancer rates and the right of youth to consent to vaccination. ICAH does not support mandated, reproductive health vaccinations.
- **ICAH supports youth-friendly health care services** that offer welcoming, non-judgmental, and safe spaces for adolescent clients.

Increasing Support for Pregnant and Parenting Youth

Youth have the right to continue a pregnancy to term and become a parent. Youth who decide to become parents should be fully supported in that decision. Pregnant and parenting youth face significant challenges in completing their educational goals while caring for their children, navigating their own adolescence, and creating a safe and healthy future for themselves. Finishing school is a critical marker for lifelong success.

Comprehensive policies and well-funded, accessible programs and services are essential in helping pregnant and parenting youth finish school.

- **ICAH supports enforcement of the federal Title IX gender equity law** that prohibits discrimination because of actual or potential parental, family, or marital status.
- **ICAH supports funding for programs and services** that help pregnant and parenting youth complete high school and achieve their educational goals.
- **ICAH provides opportunities for pregnant and parenting youth and allies** through our School of Justice, who work to increase public awareness about the challenges of adolescent pregnancy and parenthood and to advocate for educational and supportive services and policy change in schools.
- **ICAH will promote policy change as outlined in the Ensuring Success in Schools document, which we will deem as the Bill of Rights for Pregnant and Parenting Youth**, working with pregnant and parenting youth and allies to help generate supporting materials, provide testimony as needed, and advocate for educational and supportive services in schools, through the Chicago Public Schools System.