

Comprehensive Sex Education

Talking Points

- **Young people need comprehensive sexual education.** Research shows that we are failing to provide young people with the sexual health information and skills they need to lead healthy lives. Less than half of all high schools and only 20% of middle schools in the United States provide all of the 16 topics identified by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention as critical sexual health education topics. As a consequence, HIV rates are increasing among young people, and half of all new diagnoses of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) occur among teenagers and young adults. Studies show that comprehensive sex education effectively leads to increased condom and contraceptive use when young people become sexually active, thereby reducing rates of STIs and unwanted pregnancy.
- **Comprehensive sex education works.** Effective sex education has proven to promote sexual health and healthy behaviors. It also lowers rates of unwanted pregnancy, STIs, and risky sexual behaviors. Despite this, only 24 states and the District of Columbia require sex education, and just 13 states require that sex education is medically accurate. The federal government must fully fund accurate, comprehensive sex education, and defund programs that do not meet these standards.
- **Comprehensive sex education must be inclusive.** Most sex education programs are not inclusive of LGBTQ students, and several states even require educators to actively demean LGBTQ individuals. This harms LGBTQ students by placing them at increased risk for negative sexual health outcomes, promotes prejudice, and intensifies bullying. Sex education should help all youth learn about sexual orientation and gender identity, and encourage acceptance for LGBTQ young people and families.
- **Abstinence-only education is ineffective and impedes religious liberty.** Abstinence-only programs use federal taxpayer dollars to impose one particular religious viewpoint about sex and relationships on all students. Further, they fail to lower rates of teen pregnancy and STIs, do not give youth the tools they need to make informed decisions about their health, and often feature overtly conservative Christian messaging. Yet Congress has spent more than \$2 billion on abstinence-only programs since 1982. Young people should be able to make their own decisions about their sexual health, based on their personal beliefs and unbiased, accurate information.
- **Everyone should be able to make healthy and informed decisions about their future.** Marginalized youth, such as young people of color, undocumented and immigrant youth, LGBTQ youth, youth in foster care, homeless youth, and youth in juvenile detention, often cannot access information about sexual health services. Failure to teach safe sex leaves young people at risk. Young people must have sexual health information, education, and skills to help ensure they make informed decisions about their sexual health.