

# A Practical Guide for Engaging Hispanic Youth in Teen Pregnancy Prevention Programs

## Overview

Hispanics are the largest racial/ethnic minority group in the U.S. Today, one in five youth between the ages of 10 and 19 is Hispanic.<sup>1</sup> By 2020, one in four teens will be Hispanic, and nearly one in three will be Hispanic by 2050.<sup>2</sup> This fast-growing population also has the highest teen birth rate in the U.S.<sup>3</sup> Hispanic youth have diverse experiences, representing heritages of more than 20 countries with many distinct cultural backgrounds.<sup>4</sup> Given the size, growth rate, and diversity of Hispanic youth, it is important to understand the unique needs and circumstances of this population in order to deliver effective teen pregnancy prevention programming.



This practical guide provides information relevant for teen pregnancy prevention (TPP) among Hispanic youth, strategies that programs can implement to engage Hispanic youth, and a list of additional resources that can support organizations as they work to ensure that they are effectively meeting the needs of Hispanic youth in their programs.

## Key Facts for Teen Pregnancy Prevention among Hispanic Youth

Hispanic teens are more likely to experience a pregnancy than any other racial or ethnic group.<sup>5</sup> As demonstrated by Figures 1 and 2, Hispanic females have a birth rate that is more than twice the rate of their white peers, and the percentage of Hispanic males who fathered a child is also more than twice that of their white peers. Due to these disparities, it is imperative to engage Hispanic youth in teen pregnancy prevention programming both to improve their health and well-being as adolescents and to enable them to become healthy, productive adults.

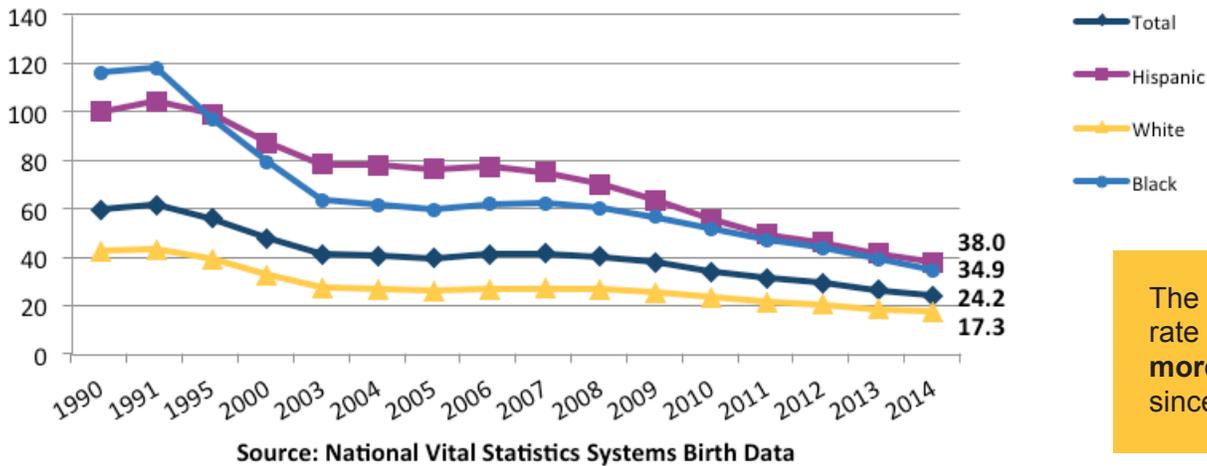
**Hispanic** is a term used in the United States to identify individuals with Spanish or Latin American heritage.<sup>6</sup> Hispanic youth can be of any racial group. Since the term Hispanic is used in many federally supported data sources, we use the term Hispanic throughout this guide. However, youth may choose to identify their heritage as Hispanic or with alternative terms, such as Latino or others that are country-of-heritage-specific.

*Respect youth's preferences for how they identify their heritage by mirroring the language and terminology that they use.*

## Hispanic teen birth rates

- In 1990, for every 1,000 Hispanic female youth between the ages of 15 and 19, 100 experienced a birth; the prevalence of teen births among Hispanic youth dropped to 38 births per 1000 female youth in 2014 (Figure 1).
- Since 1995, birth rates have remained highest among female Hispanic youth relative to their black and white peers (Figure 1).<sup>7</sup>

Figure 1: Teen Birth Rates (Ages 15-19) by Race/Ethnicity, 1990-2014

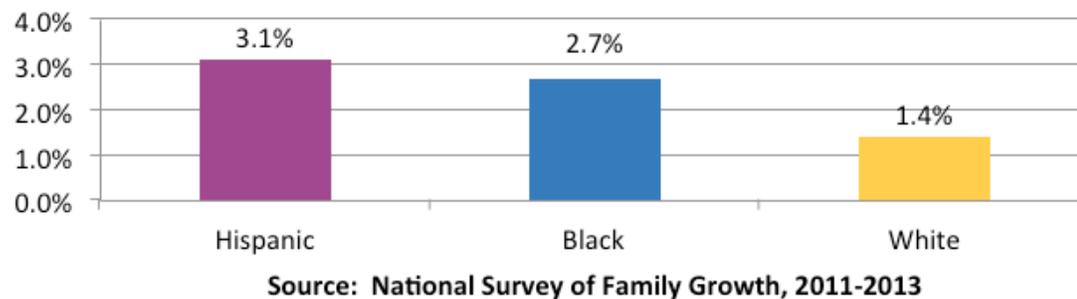


The Hispanic teen birth rate has **declined by more than 60 percent** since 1990.

## Hispanic teen fathers

- Over three percent of Hispanic males between the ages of 15 and 19 have fathered a child, compared to 2.7 percent of black and 1.4 percent of white male youth (Figure 2).<sup>8</sup>

Figure 2: Percent of Young Men Ages 15-19 who have Fathered a Child by Race/Ethnicity, 2011-2013



Hispanic male youth are **more likely to have fathered a child** than their peers.

## Diversity among Hispanic Youth

While researchers continue to examine factors that contribute to high rates of Hispanic teen births, it is also important to acknowledge that Hispanic youth are a heterogeneous group. In order to effectively engage with Hispanic youth, it is critical that TPP staff be aware of and responsive to their diverse realities. This section identifies key factors to consider for delivering culturally responsive TPP programming to Hispanic youth.

- **The term Hispanic includes those with heritage from over 20 countries.**<sup>9</sup> Hispanic youth are coming of age in households that are shaped by the characteristics of their communities—and often of their country of heritage. Among Hispanic youth between the ages of 10 and 19, Mexico and Puerto Rico represent the two largest groups: youth of Mexican heritage represent 69 percent, and youth of Puerto Rican heritage represent an additional 10 percent.<sup>10</sup> It is important to recognize that there is significant variation within and across each country of heritage.<sup>11</sup> For example, 99 percent of Hispanics of Puerto Rican heritage are U.S. citizens compared to 75 percent of those with Mexican heritage and roughly half of those with Honduran heritage. In addition, over 80 percent of Hispanics of Puerto Rican heritage speak English proficiently compared to roughly half of those of Salvadorian, Honduran and Guatemalan heritage.
- **Immigrant experiences are a reality for many Hispanic youth.** Both the nativity status—whether or not one was born in the U.S.—and the citizenship status of youth and their parents influence Hispanic youth’s well-being.<sup>12,13</sup> While the vast majority (over 90 percent) of Hispanics under the age of 18 were born in the U.S.,<sup>14</sup> many have immigrant parents—51 percent of youth between the ages of 10 and 19 are living in households with at least one parent who was born outside of the United States.<sup>15</sup> Access to resources can vary by citizenship status; however, even when eligible, Hispanic youth may not access services for fear that they might reveal the citizenship status of other family members.
- **Hispanic youth often have to consider multiple norms and values at once.** For example, a teen mother with immigrant parents may face different expectations from her parents, teachers, and community. The relationship between cultural values and pregnancy risk is not static, either. Research suggests that young Hispanic women who retain traditional cultural values are more likely to delay sex than their peers who don’t. But these same young women are less likely to use contraception.<sup>16</sup> To better serve Hispanic youth in your program, try to understand how difficult it is for them to switch between different norms every day.
- **Roughly one in ten Hispanic youth live in households in which no one over the age of 13 speaks English “very well”.**<sup>17,18,19</sup> Youth with non-English speaking parents may experience hardships, as their parents face challenges in navigating educational and social service systems. Some Hispanic youth take on adult responsibilities at an early age, serving as the “language link” in their families by translating for their parents and other family members.<sup>20</sup>
- **Hispanic youth are increasingly more likely to live in rural and suburban communities.**<sup>21,22</sup> Although still highly represented in urban gateway cities—cities such as Los Angeles and New York City that have historically served as arrival sites for immigrants—Hispanics are far less concentrated in urban areas than a generation ago. Hispanic youth in rural and suburban communities may face additional discrimination when living in places that previously had no or limited Hispanic populations. Additionally, communities experiencing an influx of Hispanic youth may lack the infrastructure to provide culturally competent services.<sup>23</sup> While less than 10 percent of Hispanic youth between the ages of 10 and 19 live in rural, non-metropolitan areas,<sup>24</sup> the rural communities in which they live are facing new opportunities and challenges, as Hispanics account for roughly half of population growth in rural areas.<sup>25</sup>

## Strategies for Engaging Hispanic Youth and Their Families

Socio-cultural factors can be leveraged to better engage Hispanic youth and their families in teen pregnancy prevention programs. From diverse staff with diverse perspectives, to acknowledging and incorporating the importance of family within Hispanic cultures into programming, professional staff have to be knowledgeable of the norms and expectations of the communities they serve. A misstep can have long-lasting, unintended consequences for recruitment, retention, and engagement of Hispanic youth.

### *Culturally competent, diverse, and nonjudgmental staff*

Culturally competent, diverse, and nonjudgmental staff play an important role in creating safe and welcoming spaces for Hispanic youth.<sup>26</sup> Culturally competent staff—those with a set of attitudes, perspectives, and behaviors that promote positive and effective interactions with diverse cultures—are often more responsive to cultural norms and equipped to respectfully engage with the individuals and communities that the program serves. It is important that professional staff who serve Hispanic youth recognize the diversity of Hispanic populations. They should also acknowledge the different social contexts (i.e. families, school, community, etc.) that these youth move between every day. These groups often have differing, even contrasting, norms and values. The following strategies can help organizations empower staff to better serve Hispanic youth:

- *Partner with community organizations that can serve as resources as your staff increases their skills in effectively working with Hispanic youth.*
- *Value staff's diverse backgrounds—shared cultural background with youth, language and translation skills, and/or professional skills and experience working with youth—and promote peer-to-peer learning.*

### *Role of parents/families*

Roughly half of Hispanic teens report that their parents are the biggest influence on their decision to have sex.<sup>27</sup> Since family support and involvement greatly contribute to success in teen pregnancy prevention programs, staff should appeal to these strong familial ties when they engage Hispanic youth. However, there are often some challenges to overcome, including language barriers, difficult work schedules, and differing expectations around youth sexual behavior. Gaining parental buy-in will facilitate youth buy-in. The following strategies can encourage parental participation:

- *Be visible at community events that are popular with Hispanic families in your community.*
- *Offer support and resources that are relevant to Hispanic families, such as English classes and employment support services.*
- *Partner with community organizations that are actively engaged in serving Hispanic youth and their families to promote trust and acceptance of your efforts.*

### **Tips for Creating a Safe and Supportive Space for Hispanic Youth**

- Be aware of the fears and risks related to citizenship status among Hispanic youth and their families in your community so that your staff can provide accurate eligibility information and support.
- Recognize the diverse cultural heritage and corresponding norms among Hispanic youth in your community.
- Offer translation of services and printed/audio materials for both youth and their families, and ensure that materials are translated in a way that is appropriate for their specific cultural background.
- When translating or adapting urban interventions for rural youth, consider adaptations that are inclusive of Hispanic youth living in rural communities.

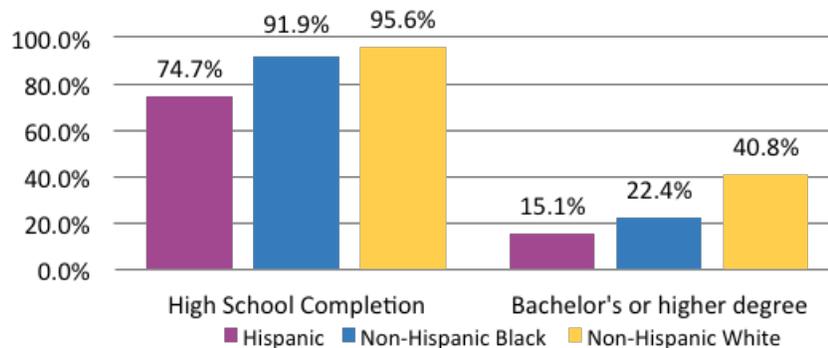
## Spotlight: Linking Teen Pregnancy Prevention with Educational Goals among Hispanic Youth

Educational attainment is positively linked with future well-being. However, Hispanic teens are more likely to drop out of high school (not enrolled in school and not high school graduates) than their white peers (6 versus 3 percent).<sup>28</sup> Moreover, among young adults ages 25-29, Hispanics lag behind other major racial/ethnic groups in educational attainment (Figure 4).<sup>29</sup> This is particularly important for TPP programs because youth who drop out of high school are more likely to become teen parents, struggle to find a job, and face a host of other challenges relative to those with a high school or college degree.<sup>30,31</sup>

Presenting teen pregnancy prevention programming in the context of supporting educational goals and aspirations can be a particularly successful approach for Hispanic youth.<sup>32,33</sup> Emphasizing the importance of school provides a future orientation that contributes to positive youth development and influences other domains of life, including their sexual and reproductive health. However, valuing education and being motivated to complete school are not always enough, as youth face competing demands for their time and efforts. For Hispanic youth, familial obligations and demands are especially salient. Supporting their families—either by entering the labor market or taking on a demanding caretaker role—is often stated as the reason for not continuing their education.<sup>34,35</sup>

Providers serving Hispanic youth should utilize strategies that both support the importance of education and are respectful of their family commitments, such as offering day care or workforce development as part of their programming.

**Figure 4: Educational Attainment (Age 25-29) by Race/Ethnicity**



Source: National Center for Education Statistics

### Resources

- *It all Starts at Home: Hispanic Parents Speak out on Preventing Teen Pregnancy* (Report): <http://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED457257>
- *Enhancing Cultural Competence in Social Service Agencies: A Promising Approach to Serving Diverse Children and Families* (Research Brief): <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/opre/resource/enhancing-cultural-competence-in-social-service-agencies-a-promising-approach-to-serving-diverse-children-and-families>
- *Fast Facts: Hispanic Teens' Sexual Behavior and Contraceptive Use: Data from the Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 2013* (Fact Sheet): <https://thenationalcampaign.org/resource/fast-facts-hispanic-teens-sexual-behavior-and-contraceptive-use>
- *Cultural insights: communicating with Hispanics/Latinos* (Practical Guide): <http://stacks.cdc.gov/view/cdc/13183/>
- Teen Pregnancy Prevention Program Grantee Videos (contains a video from a grantee implementing *Sé tú mismo*): [http://www.hhs.gov/ash/oah/resources-and-publications/multimedia/video\\_tpp.html](http://www.hhs.gov/ash/oah/resources-and-publications/multimedia/video_tpp.html)
- *Families Talking Together: Creating Healthy Family Conversations to Prevent Teen Pregnancy: A Community Health Worker Curriculum* (Practical Guide): <https://thenationalcampaign.org/resource/families-talking-together-creating-healthy-family-conversations-prevent-teen-pregnancy>

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