Advancing a Public Health Approach to Improve Sexual Health in the United States: A Framework for National Efforts

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Overview

• Historical perspective
• Why is a focus on sexual health needed now?
• Advancing sexual health in the US: where are we?
July 2001: Surgeon General’s Call to Action

- Focused on the need to promote sexual health and responsible sexual behavior across the lifespan
  - Essential component of overall individual health
  - Has major impact on overall health of communities
  - National dialogue at all levels critical in improving population health

- Primary goal to stimulate respectful, thoughtful, and mature discussion in our communities and in our home about sexuality.
*June 2009: Community Guide Review of Education Interventions for Adolescents*

- Meta-analyses of published studies on Abstinence Education (AE, \(n=23\)) and Comprehensive Risk Reduction (CRR, \(n = 62\))

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Findings</th>
<th>AE</th>
<th>CRR</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sexual activity</td>
<td>-16%*</td>
<td>-12%*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency of sex</td>
<td>-23%</td>
<td>-19%*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. Partners</td>
<td>no D</td>
<td>-14%*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unprotected sex</td>
<td>no D</td>
<td>-25%*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Use of protection (condoms, BC)</td>
<td>no D</td>
<td>+13%</td>
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<tr>
<td>STI</td>
<td>+8%</td>
<td>-31%*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pregnancy</td>
<td>+12%</td>
<td>-11%</td>
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* \(P < 0.05\)
2011: Sexual Health—Why Now?

- High population burden of STD and HIV
  - 19 million STI each year—almost half among those 15 to 24 yo
  - One in four women aged 14-19 years is infected with at least one STD
  - Estimated 1.1 million Americans are living with HIV, with over 55,000 new infections per year
  - Cost of STDs, including HIV, estimated at $15.9 billion per year
- Major health disparities
  - African–Americans: 8 to 20 X higher rates
  - MSM: 40-50 X higher rates
- Ongoing problem with teen and unintended pregnancy
  - About 12% of sexually active teens did not use birth control the last time they had sex
  - One-half of all pregnancies in the U.S. are unintended
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Rate per 1,000 girls aged 15-19 years</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bulgaria</td>
<td>43</td>
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<tr>
<td>U.S.</td>
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<td>Romania</td>
<td>39</td>
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<td>U.K.</td>
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<td>Ireland</td>
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<td>Israel</td>
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<td>Canada</td>
<td>14</td>
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<td>Germany</td>
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<td>France</td>
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<td>Norway</td>
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<td>Italy</td>
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<td>Sweden</td>
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<td>Denmark</td>
<td>6</td>
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<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Switzerland</td>
<td>4</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Teen birth rates internationally, per 1,000 girls aged 15-19 years, 2008 and 2009.
Why Does the U.S. Need A Sexual Health Focus to Enhance Public Health Efforts?

• Focus shifts from a disease-focus to a **more positive health-based approach** characterized by understanding of complex factors that shape human sexual behavior
  - Reduces stigma
  - Relevant to those seeking health (ie, everyone)

• Helps enhance the **efficiency and effectiveness of prevention messaging** and services by **bundling** messages and services
  - Effectiveness (eg, platforms for “Childhood immunizations, "Heart health”, physical fitness, etc.)

• Enhances ability to **normalize conversations** regarding contributions of sexuality and sexual behavior to overall health
Sexual Health-based Approach in Action: It’s Your Sex Life/Get Yourself Tested (GYT)

- **GYT**
  - Built on MTV/KFF platform of It’s Your Sex Life (IYSL)
  - Partnership with KFF, MTV, Planned Parenthood
  - Stimulated by finding that 1 in 4 US teens with STI

- **Goals**
  - Normalize conversation around sexual health, safety, testing
  - Raise awareness of STD prevalence/prevention methods
  - Normalize routine STD testing

- **Results**
  - Increased STD/HIV testing 20-30%
Sexual Health--Why Now? Alignment with Priorities of Administration, HHS, and CDC

• **Administration**
  - Initiative to prevent unintended teen pregnancies
  - 2012 President’s Budget request includes an increase to improve sexual health for MSM in support of National AIDS Strategy
  - Enhanced support of prevention through healthcare in Affordable Care Act
  - National Prevention Strategy—inclusion of SRH as targeted priority

• **HHS**
  - Sexual health is one of 10 leading health indicators in Healthy People 2020
  - IOM report on Clinical Preventive Services for Women: 8 recommendations relevant to SRH

• **CDC**
  - Teen pregnancy and HIV prevention two of six key “winnable battles” identified by CDC Director as agency priorities
CDC Sexual Health Consultation April 2010

• Strong endorsement by attendees: SH framework is broad, contextual, positive, inclusive, empowering

• Opportunity to communicate, normalize and destigmatize SH, leverage partners, synergize (with other “health” approaches)

• Key recommendations
  – Develop a CDC definition of sexual health and a White Paper
  – Develop key objectives & national SH indicators
  – Communications research to find right metaphors, tone, message for greatest acceptance
  – Consider a national coalition of partners to include faith-based organizations
  – Work with programs and providers to determine how a SH framework can enhance their work
Sexual Health Framework: Using health promotion to complement disease control and prevention

- Sexual Disease Control and Prevention (High-impact HIV Prevention)
  - Contextualizes the issues
  - Focuses on relationships
  - Acknowledges sexuality as health
  - Takes a syndemic approach
  - Emphasizes wellness
A Sexual Health Framework: Expanding the Focus of Traditional Disease Control and Prevention

Traditional Approach
- Focus on disease control/prevention (screening, treatment, partner services)
- Vertical public health approach
- Highly-specialized
- Limited connectivity
- Targeted approaches with a disease-focus

Doesn’t account for...
- Co-infections and other syndemics
- Social and structural determinants of health
- Silence, stigma, discrimination
- Dynamic demographic, cultural and social-political environments
- Constrained budgets

Sexual Health Framework
- Contextualizes the issue
- Addresses sexuality as an inextricable element of health
- Emphasizes wellness rather than disease
- Focuses on positive and respectful relationships
- Takes a syndemic approach to prevention

Potential Benefits
- Engages and mobilizes new and diverse partners
- Normalizes conversations
- Reduces fear, discrimination, stigma
- Enhances efficiency and effectiveness of prevention messaging and services

CDC
CDC Definition of Sexual Health: A Public Health Perspective

- Sexual health is a state of wellbeing in relation to sexuality across the lifespan that involves physical, emotional, mental, social, and spiritual dimensions.
- Sexual health is an inextricable element of human health and is based on a positive, equitable, and respectful approach to sexuality, relationships, and reproduction, that is free of coercion, fear, discrimination, stigma, shame, and violence.
- It includes the ability to understand the benefits, risks, and responsibilities of sexual behavior; the prevention of disease and other adverse outcomes; and the possibility of fulfilling sexual relationships.
- Sexual health is impacted by socioeconomic and cultural contexts—including policies, practices, and services—that support healthy outcomes for individuals and their communities.

Developed by the Sexual Health Workgroup of the CDC-HRSA Advisory Committee. 2011
### Key Objectives of CDC’s Public Health Approach for Advancing Sexual Health in the U.S.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Objectives</th>
<th>Indicators</th>
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<tr>
<td>• Increase <strong>knowledge, communication, and healthy/respectful attitudes</strong> regarding sexual health</td>
<td>3-4 (knowledge, communication, attitudes)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Increase use of high-quality, coordinated and integrated <strong>educational, programmatic, and clinical services</strong> that promote sexual health</td>
<td>6-7 (1/division, 1 cross-cutting)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Increase healthy, responsible, and respectful sexual <strong>behaviors and relationships</strong></td>
<td>3-4 (behaviors and relationships)</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Decrease <strong>adverse health outcomes</strong>, including HIV/STDs, viral hepatitis, unintended pregnancies, and sexual violence</td>
<td>6 (HIV, GC, adult Hep B, teen/unintended pregnancy, lifetime sexual violence)</td>
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NCCHSTP Coordinated Communication Project: Draft Frameworks for Sexual Health

• **Working together/shared responsibility**
  – We all have responsibility to make healthy sexual choices
  – We all must work together to ensure that everyone has opportunity for SH

• **Fair chance/opportunity**
  – All should have a fair chance to make informed choices about SH and to be free from STD, violence, unwanted pregnancy

• **Navigating a journey**
  – Life is a series of choices, including sexual choices. Throughout life, all need information/skills to make healthy choices reflecting their own values/beliefs

• **Health promotion/wellness**
  – Today we know that being healthy is more than just “not being sick”. Being sexually healthy is more than avoiding diseases
Sexual Health in the U.S.: Closing Reflections

• Sexual health framework has great potential for
  – Reducing stigma
  – Promote/normalize dialogue, engage public
  – Enhance efficiency and effectiveness of services

• Optimizing messaging essential for broadest possible support and impact
  – Must resonate with both highly affected populations as well as broad range of opinion leaders

• Implementation depends upon national and local context (eg, culture, media, faith communities, health care systems)
## Acknowledgements

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