



## **FSU Center for Prevention & Early Intervention Policy**

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# **Medicaid Policy Recommendations for Teen Parents and Their Children**

Poverty, abuse, and poor health outcomes are intricately intertwined with adolescent childbearing. The needs of most young families are complex and effectively addressing these needs is most often challenging. The experiences of the Miami-Dade project and the recent literature indicate specific strategies that can significantly improve outcomes for Medicaid-eligible teenage parents and their children. Investing in the prevention and early intervention services described below, and the coordination of these services, will produce substantial public returns by improving the health and well-being of our youngest, most vulnerable families.

<b>COMPONENT</b>	<b>DESCRIPTION</b>
<b>Establish networks of service providers</b>	In many Florida communities, health providers, social service agencies, child care providers and school districts operate in complete or relative isolation. Establishing and maintaining a network of providers that support teen parents and their children within each community is critical. Agencies and providers such as County Health Departments, Healthy Start Coalitions, Healthy Families, Part C/Early Intervention Programs, School Readiness Coalitions, WIC, and School District's Teenage Parent Programs must coordinate their efforts to achieve positive outcomes for young families.
<b>Assure Healthy Start screening of each teen parent</b>	The logical and most effective starting point for service delivery and coordination is Healthy Start screenings for every pregnant adolescent in every community. Healthy Start staff are familiar with local service providers and their mission is to improve health outcomes for mothers and babies. Following the initial screening, eligible pregnant and parenting teens can receive a range of services to include care coordination, referrals for appropriate health services, enhanced services, and support for breastfeeding.
<b>Advocate for comprehensive educational programs</b>	Each school district in Florida is required by statute to provide services to teen parents and their children. Those who understand the needs of parenting students must advocate for high quality comprehensive educational programs in each district that truly addresses the complex needs of young families. Health and social service providers must convey two consistent messages: 1) Pregnant and parenting teens must understand that it is critical for their own future - and their child's future - that they continue their education; and 2) School district administrators must understand that the best opportunity to improve outcomes for these vulnerable children is at schools that provide on-site child care and comprehensive services. Medicaid funds should be used to enhance and coordinate the services provided at teenage parent programs, which serve as a natural hub for improving outcomes.
<b>Promote high quality child care</b>	High quality child care provides a protective environment for young children and a source of support for young families. When provided at schools where parenting students continue their education, quality child care can enhance bonding between parents and their children, model parenting skills, serve as an entry point for access to health and social services, support the development of both the parent and the child, and promote family health and well being.

COMPONENT	DESCRIPTION
<p><b>Increase understanding of the developmental needs of teen parents</b></p>	<p>Service providers must recognize that adolescent parents are not simply younger versions of their adult clients. Teen parents are involved in their own adolescent development, which is complicated by their adult responsibilities as parents. Providers that are successful in serving young parents and their children understand the developmental dynamics of both young parents and young children. When health and social service providers are knowledgeable about adolescent development, they are far better equipped to use the resilience of youth and the hope of a new birth to help young parents overcome their lack of experience or social emotional maturity and to provide better lives for their children.</p>
<p><b>Raise awareness of Early Intervention Services</b></p>	<p>All professionals that serve teen parents must have knowledge of the Part C / Early Intervention Program services available in their communities. By assuring early intervention screening and assessment, the children of adolescent parents will receive timely and appropriate interventions instead of needing much costlier treatment services later. Early Intervention Programs can partner with teenage parent programs to provide onsite services that involve the parenting student, the child care provider, and other professionals in all aspects of assessment and treatment.</p>
<p><b>Promote relationship-based interventions</b></p>	<p>Consistent and caring relationships are critical to the work of improving outcomes for young parents and their children. In a recent policy statement, the American Academy of Pediatrics recognized the importance of relationship-based interventions by stating, “Pediatricians should provide continuity of care and a ‘medical home’ for adolescent parents, as well as for their children.” Recognizing strengths, defining areas for growth, providing appropriate resources, and supporting positive change all occur when the teen parent is known to the provider of services. Successful outcomes are linked to services being provided within the context of relationships that are continuous over time.</p>
<p><b>Address substance abuse issues during pregnancy and postpartum</b></p>	<p>Recent studies indicate that the use of alcohol, cigarettes, and drugs by teens decreases significantly during pregnancy. However, the use of these substances increases after the birth of the baby. All health care providers must be reminded to ask open-ended questions of pregnant and parenting teens to encourage discussion, informed choices, and healthy outcomes for pregnant teens, parenting teens, and their children.</p>
<p><b>Utilize an infant mental health framework</b></p>	<p>The use of infant mental health principles are strongly recommended in programs that serve adolescent parents and their children. These principles support the parent-child relationship, promote responsive caregiving, acknowledge the role of relationship-focused early intervention, and provide ongoing services for young families over time. An infant mental health framework acknowledges the individual needs of each teen parent and respects their role as parent to the child.</p>
<p><b>Establish multi-disciplinary teams</b></p>	<p>It is not uncommon for several individuals who work with a teen parent and her child to have no communication with each other on the services being provided. Linkages between professionals and across community agencies are essential in providing a medical home, mental health and social services, and therapeutic interventions. Multi-disciplinary teams offer an opportunity for ongoing communication and ensure continuity of care across multiple disciplines.</p>

Additional resources:

American Academy of Pediatrics (2001). Care of Adolescent Parents and Their Children. *Pediatrics*, 107(2), 429-434.

National Organization of Adolescent Pregnancy, Parenting and Prevention (2003). Policy Statement on the Unique Developmental Needs of the Children of Adolescent Parents. *In Press*.