



North Carolina’s teen pregnancy rate is at a historic low, resulting in healthier teens, healthier families, and healthier communities. The state’s 1971 law to allow minors to consent to the diagnosis, prevention, and treatment of pregnancy (excluding abortion) has been a major contributor to the decline in teen pregnancy. The Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention Campaign of North Carolina (APPCNC) strongly recommends safeguarding North Carolina’s current laws to allow minors to consent to health services.

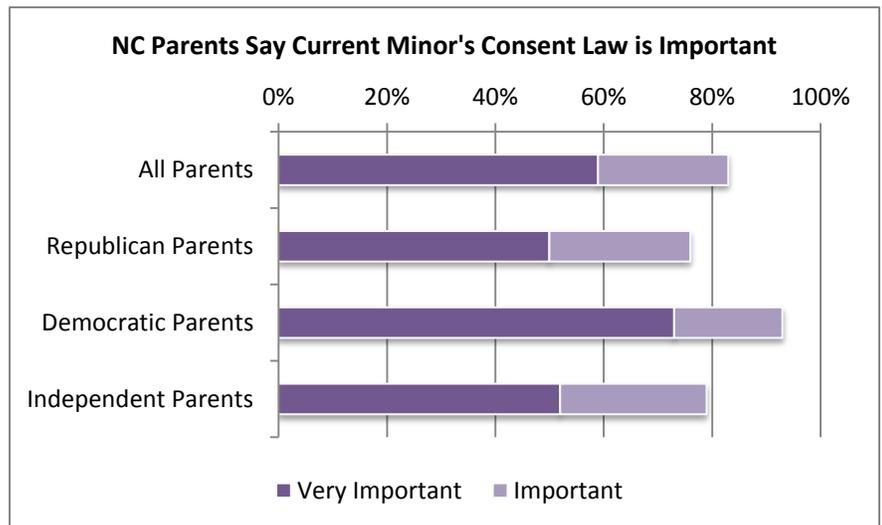
Teen pregnancy rates in North Carolina have dropped 58% since 1990. North Carolina’s teen pregnancy rate is at the lowest level in recorded history. Because of the decline, teen abortion rates have declined 74%.ⁱ

Approximately half of all NC high school students have had sexual intercourse. By 12th grade, the percentage of students who have had sexual intercourse is 64%. The percentage of sexually active students has not changed significantly.ⁱⁱ

Increased contraceptive use is the primary reason teen pregnancy has declined. A peer reviewed analysis of the decline in teen pregnancy during the 1990s and 2000s shows that 14% of the decline can be attributed to delays in sexual activity (i.e. waiting longer to become sexually active) and 86% can be attributed to increased/better contraceptive use. Altering these trends could reverse North Carolina’s progress in reducing teen pregnancy.ⁱⁱⁱ

Parents of all political backgrounds say North Carolina’s current Minor’s Consent law is important. According to a statewide poll conducted in January 2013, 83% percent of North Carolina parents say the state’s current Minor’s Consent law is important. Majorities of parents from both major political parties say the law is “very important.”^{iv}

Requiring parental consent reduces contraceptive use. Six in ten teens (63%) and adults (62%) agree that the primary reason teens don’t use contraception is because they are afraid that their parents will find out. However, most parents say that if they learned that their teen was using contraception, they would be unhappy that they were having sex but happy that their daughter (63%) or son (69%) was using contraception.^v



Source: PPP Poll, January 18-22, 2013.

Requiring parental consent prevents youth from getting important medical help. According to focus groups of high-risk North Carolina youth:

1. A majority do not feel they can talk to their parents about reproductive health – and this was true for teens practicing abstinence as well as those who are sexually active.
2. Confidentiality is the number one concern when asked about barriers to accessing reproductive health care.

Minor’s Consent protects the most vulnerable young people. The current law provides critical protections to especially vulnerable youth, including youth with uninvolved parents or youth being sexually abused by a parent. In addition, privacy protections can lead to earlier prenatal care (and thus healthier birth outcomes) for girls who may need care but are not sure yet how to tell a parent.

Minor's Consent in Action

While Minor's Consent laws protect and encourage access to health care, clinicians and public health professionals strive – with the help of the law's framework – to strengthen communications between parents and their children. The following example illustrates how one Gaston County clinic, the Teen Wellness Center, uses the law to better serve families.

Shamia, Teen Patient

"I didn't want my Mom to know at first. She already had a lot of stress on her and I didn't want to put more stress on her by telling her that I was sexually active. I didn't know how to talk to her about it. I got brochures at the Teen Wellness Center on how to talk to my parent. My mom later suggested that I get on birth control, and then I was able to talk to her and tell her I was already on it. She was relieved that I was responsible enough to know to get the Depo shot, and that she didn't have to come to every appointment with me. She was happy that she wouldn't have to miss work to take me to an appointment."

Fatika, Shamia's Mom

"Sometimes teens don't have a parent to talk to or an adult in their life that they can talk to. They are trying to take care of themselves before something bad happens. When they come they are also getting education to help prevent teen pregnancy and diseases. Now I think she can come to me with what she has learned from her visit. It is part of growing up and becoming a young woman, doing things on your own and learning things on your own. I have a hard time getting up there because of work, her school is right by the Health Department and she can go even when I cannot take her. Lower income areas especially don't have parents that participate in their life. The teens don't learn these things – like what goes on with their body – until they go to the doctor. They learn how they can stop the cycle of teen pregnancy that came before them."

Excerpt, Teen Wellness Center Parent Notification Letter (emphasis original to letter)

"Teens often have questions or concerns that they may feel embarrassed to talk about in front of their parents. It is important to give them enough freedom to grow but not so much that they get involved in the wrong activities.

Many teenagers experiment with *high-risk* behaviors that can lead to serious problems:

- **14% report binge drinking**
- **12% have used marijuana**
- **32% have felt sad**
- **39 % have had sex by 9th grade**

Many teenagers may hide their behavior so parents/caregivers are not the first to find out. Our goal is to help identify these problems before they become too big and to help prevent them. To do this we must give them a reason to trust us.

North Carolina law requires that some services are offered to teens privately. We ask parents/caregivers to leave for part of the interview for confidentiality and to build trust. We also encourage the teen to discuss important issues with parents/caregivers. **It is important to know that if they are doing anything to hurt themselves or others, or if someone is hurting them, we will be forced to break confidentiality.**

The staff is always available to discuss health problems or answer any questions you may have. The Teen Wellness Center staff wants to work with you to help teens and young adults make the best choices for a healthy future."

ⁱ http://files.www.appcnc.org/data/map/northcarolina/30_Year_Teen_Pregnancy_Trends_1981-2011.pdf

ⁱⁱ 2011 NC Youth Risk Behavior Survey. Retrieved from: <http://www.nchealthyschools.org/docs/data/vrbs/2011/statewide/high-school.pdf>

ⁱⁱⁱ Santelli, John S., Lindberg, Laura D., Finer, Lawrence B., and Singh, Susheela. "Explaining Recent Declines in Adolescent Pregnancy in the United States: The Contribution of Abstinence and Improved Contraceptive Use." *Journal of Public Health* 97.1 (January 2007)

^{iv} *APPCNC Parent Opinion Poll. Public Policy Polling, January 18-22, 2013.* Retrieved from <http://www.appcnc.org/news-and-publications/research-and-publications/parent-poll-shows-bipartisan-support-for-sex-education-pregnancy-prevention>

^v Albert, B. (2010). *With One Voice 2010: America's Adults and Teens Sound Off About Teen Pregnancy.* Washington, DC: The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy