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Mayor Barrett Sets New Goal to Slash Milwaukee Teen Birth Rates in Half

Community collaborative releases 2013 teen birth data, sets goal to lower overall teen birth rates and reduce disparities by 2023

MILWAUKEE – Just one year after announcing the city had surpassed its goal of reducing teen birth rates for teens by 46 percent by 2015, Mayor Tom Barrett and the city’s Teen Pregnancy Prevention Initiative, led by United Way of Greater Milwaukee, are back, setting a new bold goal to further cut teen birth rates by 50 percent by 2023.

“Last year, we celebrated a momentous accomplishment by not only meeting our goal of reducing Milwaukee’s teen birth rates by 46 percent by 2015, but surpassing that goal three years early,” said Mayor Tom Barrett, a member of the city’s Teen Pregnancy Prevention Oversight Committee. “This year we are saying: Let’s keep this momentum going. We have made significant progress, but our rates are still too high. Reducing teen birth rates further will once again take an incredible effort, but we owe children and families in Milwaukee nothing but our very best work.”

The announcement comes as Milwaukee’s 2013 teen birth rate data was released, showing the overall teen birth rate declined for the seventh year in a row to a new low of 22.9 births per 1,000 females ages 15 to 17, a decrease from 24.5 in 2012. While the rate for Hispanic teens also dropped substantially, from 38.1 in 2012 to 23.9 in 2013, the rate for non-Hispanic Black teens increased to 30.8 in 2013 compared to 26.6 in 2012 and the rate for non-Hispanic White teens ticked up to 3.5 in 2013 from 3.4 in 2012. In addition, the overall number of births to teens under the age of 15 has also been reduced to 14 in 2013.

“It is incredibly rewarding to see the overall number continue to decline,” said Nicole Angresano, Vice President of Community Impact for United Way of Greater Milwaukee. “But the data also illustrate that we cannot become complacent. We have young people entering that critical age group each year and we need to work as hard as ever to ensure ongoing success.”

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(Page 2)

This new goal, developed by Mayor Barrett, the United Way of Greater Milwaukee, the City of Milwaukee Health Department, the Center for Urban Population Health, and the Joseph J. Zilber School of Public Health seeks to lower the overall teen birth rate, as well as the rate for each racial and ethnic group, to below 15 per 1,000 by 2023.

“This new goal is not only about reducing our overall rates, but about closing the gap between racial and ethnic groups,” said Commissioner of Health Bevan K. Baker, co-chair of the Teen Pregnancy Prevention Initiative Oversight Committee at United Way of Greater Milwaukee. “Today we are saying that we will not leave anyone behind, and that all of our children are important and essential to our city’s future.”

The decline in teen birth rates in Milwaukee is attributed to the continuation of an unprecedented all-hands-on-deck approach adopted by the Milwaukee community since 2008. The effort is led by United Way of Greater Milwaukee, which brought together a diverse collaborative of community stakeholders that included local businesses, media outlets, health care providers, Milwaukee Public Schools, and community- and faith-based organizations.

“Our past success shows that we can come together to meet a tough goal, said Betsy Brenner, President and Publisher of Milwaukee Journal Sentinel and co-chair of the Teen Pregnancy Prevention Initiative Oversight Committee at United Way of Greater Milwaukee. “But make no mistake, this new goal will be even more difficult to meet. We will all have to rededicate ourselves to a lot of hard work over the next 10 years to cut these rates in half again.”

Along with education efforts, a public marketing strategy has sought to show teens how getting pregnant negatively affects both young men and young women. In addition, the efforts have emphasized encouraging parents to talk to their teens about the issue. The campaigns have also brought attention to the problems of sexual violence and victimization of teens.

*The State of Wisconsin Vital Records office has not yet confirmed the 2013 birth figures for Milwaukee. Therefore, the currently-reported 2013 rates are based on preliminary City data that have not yet been certified by the State.

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