

Preconception care is a prevention-based strategy that aims to improve pregnancy outcomes by identifying and modifying biomedical, behavioral, and social risks for poor birth outcomes before a woman becomes pregnant regardless of whether it is her first or a subsequent pregnancy.¹ It consists of health education, health promotion, screening, and interventions that reduce any risk factors that may affect the woman's health and future pregnancy outcomes. Interconception care refers to preconception care provided to women between pregnancies. Both preconception and interconception care are unique opportunities to improve both women's and men's overall health, as well as the health of future children.

Preconception care is more than just a single pre-pregnancy visit. Preconception care should be ongoing over the course the lifespan, beginning in early adolescence and continuing through reproductive years. Therefore, health professionals—including obstetricians and gynecologists, family and general practitioners, pediatricians, nurses, mental health providers, health educators, nutritionists, home visitors, and public health workers—all play key roles in preconception care delivery.

Making the Case for Preconception Care

Many of the interventions used to improve maternal and perinatal outcomes are aimed at women who have already conceived. These interventions focus on minimizing exposure to maternal and infant health risk factors during the prenatal period. However, research over the past decade has shown that improving women's and men's health prior to conception is also a critical approach to preventing poor birth outcomes.

Family planning goals for the United States were established in *Healthy People 2020* to work toward improving pregnancy planning, spacing, and preventing unintended pregnancy.² Approximately half of all pregnancies in the United States are unintended.³ If a pregnancy is not planned prior to conception, the woman and baby may be at increased risk for pregnancy complications because the mother may not be at optimal health for childbearing. Additionally, women whose pregnancies are unintended are likely to initiate prenatal care later in pregnancy than those whose pregnancies are intended. Therefore, adopting a healthy lifestyle is important for all women and men of reproductive age.

State Health Agency Role in Preconception Care

Through the delivery of population-based health programs, state and territorial health agencies (S/THAs) have the opportunity to improve preconception health among state residents. S/THAs are uniquely positioned to build partnerships among their programs that play a part in preconception care (e.g., chronic and infectious diseases; adolescent, maternal, and child health; mental health; health promotion programs; and nutrition and physical activity programs) and with other stakeholders, such as state Medicaid and education programs, nonprofit and for-profit service delivery organizations, and professional associations. Because no dedicated funding for preconception care exists at the federal level, states have used a variety of strategies to build these partnerships for preconception care.

Opportunities for State Health Agencies

- Offer interventions for identified risks.
- Focus on women who are at high risk for poor pregnancy outcomes.
- Partner with education agencies to reach adolescents with interventions around pregnancy, STI prevention, nutrition, physical activity, etc.
- Incorporate elements of preconception health into existing public health services and programs.
- Explore methods for delivering preconception care to the uninsured and underinsured.

State Examples of Preconception and Interconception Interventions

- **Colorado** developed an easy-to-understand paper *Life Plan Booklet* ([evaluation](#)) to increase the knowledge of women of reproductive age on preconception health and wellbeing topics to encourage them to initiate conversations with their healthcare providers and establish personal pregnancy planning goals. Similarly, **Delaware** developed *Pursuing Motherhood Planning Before Pregnancy: A Guide*. The guidebook is designed to help women achieve maximum health before attempting to get pregnant by providing information about how to address the factors contributing to infant mortality in their state.
- As part of an Association of Maternal and Child Health Programs and ASTHO Action Learning Collaborative project, **Oregon** developed [preconception health recommendations](#) tailored to young adults with disabilities. Recommendations are organized using a socio-ecological model so that all sectors and individuals see the role they can play in addressing the specific reproductive health and safety issues that this population faces.
- **Louisiana** added an interpregnancy component to their [Medicaid Section 1115 waiver](#) to increase the capacity of primary care for low-income, high-risk women of childbearing age. Eligible women with recent Medicaid-funded births with adverse health outcomes are eligible for more comprehensive care. **Georgia** also expanded their [Medicaid Section 1115 waiver](#) to cover family planning and related services to low-income women who are not otherwise eligible for Medicaid, the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP), or have any other health insurance coverage. The program also provides coverage for interpregnancy care services for eligible women.
- The **North Carolina** Division of Public Health and the NC Chapter of the March of Dimes partner to provide multivitamins with folic acid to low income non-pregnant women of childbearing age through health departments and other safety net providers. The NC General Assembly provides limited funding for the [statewide distribution of vitamins](#) to help prevent birth defects and improve birth outcomes.
- The Interconception Care Project for **California** is a set of evidence-based postpartum clinical resources and companion patient education materials designed to improve the mother's health and reduce risk in future pregnancies. The American Congress of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, District IX, and the March of Dimes developed the [guidelines](#) as a collaborative project.
- The [Baby Blossom Collaborative](#) (BBC) is a partnership between public health and community stakeholders to address infant mortality in **Nebraska**. One of BBC's priorities is to address preconception health through the Now and Beyond program, which aims to educate women of childbearing age about the importance of a healthy lifestyle and the value of planning a pregnancy and promote preconception health messages to youth.

¹ Johnson K, Posner SF, Biermann J, *et al.* "Recommendations for Improving Preconception Health and Health Care – United States." Available at <http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/rr5506a1.htm>. Accessed 4-3-2013.

² HHS, Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion. "Healthy People 2020 – Family Planning." Available at <http://www.healthypeople.gov/2020/topicsobjectives2020/overview.aspx?topicid=13>. Accessed 4-3-2013.

³ Finer LB, Zolna MR. "Unintended pregnancy in the United States: Incidence and disparities, 2006." *Contraception*. Available at <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/22018121>. Accessed 5-24-2013.