



For Immediate Release

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New Report Calls for Immediate Action to Improve Adolescent Sexual Health in South Carolina

COLUMBIA, S.C., August 30, 2012 – The South Carolina State Alliance for Adolescent Sexual Health (SAASH), a multidisciplinary team of health professionals, non-profit organizations, and community leaders, has issued a new report that seeks major changes in the way our state approaches promoting the sexual health and well-being of our youth.

The report, titled the *Call to Action Resource Document*, asks that schools, health care providers, policymakers and parents take immediate action. Recommendations include:

- Uniform implementation of the Comprehensive Health Education Act (CHEA), passed by the South Carolina legislature in 1988. District and school comprehensive health education staff continue to need professional development to implement effective programs and practices to meet the goals of existing policies;
- Investment in comprehensive, age-appropriate, medically accurate, evidence-based sexual health education;
- An increase in the number of teen-friendly clinics to improve access to testing and screening for youth;
- That teachers responsible for providing instruction in reproductive and sexual health receive relevant professional development.

In addition to providing concrete policy recommendations, the report shows that adolescents who are at risk for poor *academic* performance are also at risk for negative sexual health outcomes. This correlation has led to a significant health and education disparity for South Carolina's young people.

Teen birth, STD and HIV rates in South Carolina are consistently among the highest in the nation. Moreover, South Carolina continues to have one of the lowest graduation rates in the country.

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“The statistics paint an alarming picture in South Carolina and reveal a dire need for immediate action on behalf of our youth,” said SAASH member Deborah Billings, Ph.D., Assistant Professor, Health Promotion, Education and Behavior at the Arnold School of Public Health at the University of South Carolina. “We know that well-designed, well-implemented community and school-based prevention programs have been proven to work. We need action that is collaborative, across health and education, to address these issues and act on the solutions detailed in our report.”

The *Call to Action Resource Document* relied on the latest data from the Youth Risk Behavior Survey, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the South Carolina Law Enforcement Division, the U.S. Department of Education and other national and state data sources. These resources and more can be found at the SAASH website: <http://www.saashsc.org/>

About SAASH

The South Carolina State Alliance for Adolescent Sexual Health is an integrated, statewide youth-focused sexual and reproductive health coalition formed in 2008 to promote collaborative, effective partnerships among state health and education departments and other agencies and organizations.