

[Access to Birth Control Should Not be Curtailed; Preventing Unplanned Pregnancy Delivers Benefits to Parents, Children, and Society, According to New Brookings-Princeton Brief](#)

Newer forms of birth control have the potential to dramatically reduce the rate of unplanned pregnancies and abortions

Of all the policies that might prevent non-marital births -- 40 percent of all U.S. births, or 9 times more than in 1960 -- helping couples avoid early, unplanned childbearing through the use of birth control may be the most effective and will also help restore marriage and improve parenting, according to a policy brief published with the Fall 2015 issue of the Princeton-Brookings journal [The Future of Children](#) released today.

In "[The Promise of Birth Control](#)" policy brief, Ron Haskins, Senior Fellow in Economic Studies and Co-Director of the Brookings Center on Children and Families, Brookings Senior Fellow Isabel Sawhill, and Princeton University's Sara McLanahan demonstrate that children born outside marriage fare worse on average than children born to married parents. The majority of these children are likely to spend some or all of their early years in single-parent homes, and research finds that children in female-headed families are five times as likely to live in poverty. Non-marital births also lead to increased public spending on health care and social welfare programs.

Haskins, Sawhill, and McLanahan argue that one way to prevent births outside marriage is to help more women delay childbearing if that is their choice through the use of effective birth control. They point to several studies that show that expanding the use of subsidized birth control would effectively reduce the number of unplanned births and abortions and produce substantial taxpayer savings. Newer forms of birth control, known as long-acting, reversible contraception (LARCs) such as IUDs, are particularly effective and also produce the most favorable cost-benefit ratios, they note. A national study found that the unplanned pregnancy rate in clinics that offered counseling about methods of birth control as well as the actual birth control method selected by the mothers was about half that of clinics that did not offer those services. Similar studies have also found the availability and use of LARCs to reduce abortion rates, and still other research has demonstrated that LARCs can save more than \$7 for every \$1 spent.

"Programs designed to reduce unplanned births outside marriage for teenagers and adults have brought a wide array of benefits for couples, children, government, and society," write the authors. "But recent episodes in the politics of birth control show that both federal and state elected officials sometimes either fail to fully support such programs or oppose them outright."

The arguments used by opponents of expanded birth control programs—that there is already enough funding for birth control; that birth control encourages sex among teenagers; that the IUD is a form of abortion—can be effective in legislative and electoral debates, write Haskins, Sawhill, and McLanahan. But "If these arguments are successful in reducing funding, many of the benefits derived from birth control by parents (including teens), children, government, and society will be lost," they conclude.

[Read the policy brief](#)

[Read the full journal](#)

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The [*Future of Children*](#) is a collaboration of the Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs at Princeton University and the Brookings Institution's Center on Children and Families.