

Mission Statement

The mission of the Healthy Marriage Initiative is to help couples who have chosen marriage for themselves gain greater access to marriage education services, on a voluntary basis, where they can acquire the skills and knowledge necessary to form and sustain a healthy marriage.

Background

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, 90 percent of all Americans will marry someday.ⁱ In fact, 93 percent of all Americans hope to enter into a “lasting and happy union with one person.” However, the percentage of Americans over 18 currently married decreased from 72 percent in 1970, to 62 percent in 1990 to 59 percent in 2002.ⁱⁱ This trend exists across racial and ethnic lines as well. In 1990, 64 percent of Whites were married, compared to 61 percent in 2002. In 1990, 46 percent of African Americans were married, compared to 43 percent in 2002. In 1990, 62 percent of Hispanics were married, compared to 58 percent in 2002.ⁱⁱⁱ

The decline in marriage rates combined with the increase in divorce, cohabitation and out-of-wedlock childbearing has led to a substantial decrease in the percentage of children living with married parents. There is an abundance of social science evidence indicating that children fare best if they grow up with their married, biological parents. Children who grow up in other family forms are at substantially greater risk of having serious problems including emotional, behavioral or substance abuse problems and poorer educational outcomes.

This research showing the substantial benefits of healthy marriage for adults, children and society (see *Why Marriage Matters* section) is the primary motivating factor for the Administration for Children and Families’ implementation of the Healthy Marriage Initiative (HMI).^{iv}

ⁱ *Healthy Marriage Initiative: Building Real Solutions for Real People*. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families (www.acf.hhs.gov) Office of Family Assistance under a contract with ICF Consulting. Contract No. 233-02-0094.

ⁱⁱ U.S. Census Bureau, Statistical Abstract of the United States, 1987.: p.38, Table 44; and U.S. Census Bureau, Statistical Abstract of the United States, 2003: Table 61, www.census.gov/prod/2004pubs/03statb/pop.pdf

ⁱⁱⁱ Note that Hispanics may be included in the White and Black categories. U.S. Census Bureau, Statistical Abstract of the United States, 2003: Table 61, www.census.gov/prod/2004pubs/03statb/pop.pdf

^{iv} *Healthy marriage Initiative Activities and Accomplishments 2002-2004*. Administration for Children and Families Healthy Marriage Initiative, Department of Health and Human Services 2006. http://www.acf.hhs.gov/healthymarriage/pdf/2002-2005_aa.pdf