

VII. FORMATION AND MAINTENANCE OF MARRIED TWO-PARENT FAMILIES

One of the central purposes of TANF is to encourage the formation and maintenance of married two-parent families. Child well-being is generally enhanced by being raised with the love and committed guidance of both parents. On average, children raised by parents in healthy marriages are less likely than those of other family forms to fail at school, suffer an emotional or behavioral problem requiring psychiatric treatment, be victims of child abuse and neglect, become pregnant as teenagers, get into trouble with the law, use illicit drugs, smoke cigarettes, abuse alcohol, engage in early and promiscuous sexual activity, grow up in poverty, or attempt suicide. Children raised by parents in healthy marriages are also, on average, more likely to have a higher sense of self-esteem, form healthy marriages when they marry, attend college, and to be physically healthier (See Waite & Gallagher, 2000, for a review¹).

Families with two committed parents also greatly improve their prospects for income security. In 2002, the U.S. Census Bureau reported that the poverty rate for people in married couple families with related children was just 7.5 percent, compared to 17.9 percent in male-headed families and 35.2 percent in female-headed families.²

Not every person can or should marry, and not all who are married can or should remain so. However, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) is encouraging States to explore ways to help interested individuals and couples gain access to the skills and knowledge that will increase the likelihood they will form and sustain healthy marriages. Such strategies need not involve TANF cash recipients specifically, and can be part of a larger human service delivery strategy to improve the well-being of children.

State governments have explored various strategies for helping couples form and sustain healthy marriages as part of an effort to help families achieve self-sufficiency and improve child well-being. Recent research by the Lewin Group, with updates from State contacts, indicates that these efforts take many different forms, including the following:³

¹ Waite, L.J., & Gallagher, M. (2000). *The Case for Marriage: Why Married People are Happier, Healthier, and Better Off Financially*. New York, NY: Broadway Books.

² U.S. Census Bureau. (2003). *TablePOV05: People in Families by Relationship to Householder, Age of Householder, Number of Related Children Present, Below 100% of Poverty – All Races*. Available from http://ferret.bls.census.gov/macro/032003/pov/new05_100_01.htm

³ Adapted from Karen N. Gardiner, Michael E. Fishman, Plamen Nikolov, Asaph Glosser, and Stephanie Laud. (2002). *State Policies to Promote Marriage*. Falls Church, VA: The Lewin Group.

State campaigns. These include media projects that educate the public about the important of healthy marriage and larger-scale initiatives, such as a statewide effort to curb divorce rates.

Commissions. These include “summits” that bring together diverse groups to discuss marriage-strengthening policies and commissions charged with implementing specific policies.

Proclamations. States have issued proclamations recognizing the importance of marriage as a public good or reaffirming marriage’s special status as the foundation for healthy families.

Conferences. States have sponsored marriage strengthening conferences.

Incentives for marriage preparation for adults. Some States have reduced marriage license fees for those taking marriage preparation courses.

Marriage education for adults. This includes efforts to provide access to marriage education materials and services.

State funding for marriage education. TANF funds have been used to provide individuals and couples access to relationship skills and knowledge that will increase their chances of forming and sustaining a healthy marriage.

Removing disincentives to marriage in TANF. States are in the process of removing the disincentives to marriage in their TANF programs. For example, many States have eliminated rules that restrict the inclusion of two-parent families in State TANF programs and base two-parent family eligibility for TANF cash assistance solely on financial circumstances.

School-based marriage education. Educational programs have been designed to give high school students a firsthand understanding of the challenges of marriage, including relationship skills and the benefits of forming and sustaining healthy marriages.

Table A summarizes these activities by State.

Table A

State Activities to Form and Sustain Healthy Marriages¹

State	Commissions, Campaigns, Conferences, or Proclamations	Incentives for Marriage Preparation	Marriage Education for Adults	State Funding for Marriage Education	Removing Disincentives to Marriage in TANF	School-Based Marriage Education
Alabama					X	
Alaska					X	
Arizona	X		X	X	X	
Arkansas	X				X	
California					X	
Colorado	X				X	
Connecticut					X	
Delaware					X	
Dist. of Col.			X	X		
Florida	X	X	X		X	X

State	Commissions, Campaigns, Conferences, or Proclamations	Incentives for Marriage Preparation	Marriage Education for Adults	State Funding for Marriage Education	Removing Disincentives to Marriage in TANF	School-Based Marriage Education
Georgia					X	
Hawaii					X	
Idaho					X	
Illinois					X	
Indiana			X		X	
Iowa					X	
Kansas					X	
Kentucky					X	
Louisiana	X		X	X	X	
Maine					X	
Maryland		X	X		X	
Massachusetts	X				X	
Michigan			X	X	X	
Minnesota		X	X		X	
Mississippi	X		X		X	
Missouri					X	
Montana					X	
Nebraska					X	
Nevada					X	
New Hampshire	X				X	X
New Jersey					X	
New Mexico					X	
New York					X	
North Carolina	X				X	
North Dakota					X	
Ohio					X	
Oklahoma	X	X	X	X	X	
Oregon					X	
Pennsylvania					X	X
Rhode Island					X	
South Carolina	X				X	X
South Dakota						X
Tennessee	X	X	X		X	
Texas	X		X	X	X	
Utah	X		X	X	X	
Vermont					X	
Virginia					X	
Washington					X	
West Virginia					X	
Wisconsin				X	X	
Wyoming					X	

¹States were marked with an X if the policy or program was in place as of the end of FY 2002.

Source: Adapted from Karen N. Gardiner, Michael E. Fishman, Plamen Nikolov, Asaph Glosser, and Stephanie Laud. (2002). State Policies to Promote Marriage. Falls Church, VA: The Lewin Group.