

# Focusing on unintended pregnancies<sup>16-2</sup>

An Iowa group's research shows 50 percent of pregnancies in the state are unintended.

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Former Iowa first lady Christie Vilsack spends most of her time meeting with Rotary groups and state legislators to further a cause she believes in: preventing unplanned pregnancies.

"As much as they were looking at the ground, partly it's because everybody in that room has a story," said Vilsack, the executive director of Iowa Initiative, a privately funded group working to decrease unintended pregnancies among Iowa women between 18 and 30 years old.

Members of the UI Feminist Majority Leadership Alliance met with Iowa Initiative on Thursday night at the Iowa City Public Library to discuss how education can prevent unintended pregnancies, glean information from a younger crowd.

The Des Moines-based Iowa Initiative is a five-year program that kicked off in January. After five years, the group plans to present its findings to lawmakers in Washington about what educational measures have and haven't proved effective in preventing unplanned pregnancies.

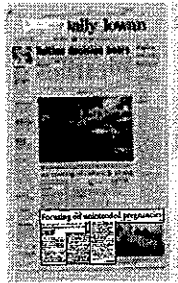
Research from the group indicates 72.8 percent of pregnancies for Iowa women age 18 to

19 are unplanned, with fewer as age increases. All together, roughly half of all pregnancies in Iowa are unplanned.

"Up until this point, this target audience hasn't been a focus when it comes to unintended pregnancy," said Tonja Richards, the Iowa Initiative director of communications. "That doesn't mean [the children] aren't wanted, it's just when women are asked when they're coming out of the hospital, 'Did you plan to have a pregnancy?' they didn't really mean to."

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## Half of Iowa's pregnancies unintended

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Vilsack spoke with members of the Feminist Majority Leadership Alliance to discuss how to approach women in the group's target demographic. Vilsack said she was particularly interested in discussing the issue with student Feminist Majority Leadership members.

"We're trying to call attention to the fact that it's not just about teenagers, that it is about adult women who are trying to find the best methods to protect themselves," she said. "I was shocked when I got this job, because I always thought it was about teenage pregnancy."

UI junior Jessica Brock

said it's more difficult for women in their 20s to justify unwanted pregnancies than it is for teenage girls.

"I think there's a stigma for older women," she said. "If you're younger, it's more acceptable for you to not want to have the baby. When you're older it's like, 'Why don't you want to have the baby? You're old.'"

Iowa Initiative doesn't directly supply women with contraceptives, but it attempts to lower unintended pregnancy rates by unconventionally educating women, Vilsack said. One of those methods is the Salon Intervention project, which aims to use hair stylists as a means of providing health

messages and referrals to family planning centers to their clients.

UI sophomore Marni Steadham identified high-school sexual-education programs as an early barrier for women seeking sexual information.

"I think the problem is that we're not getting sexual education. We're getting reproductive education, which isn't the same," she said. "By focusing just purely on the reproductive part, you're missing out on this whole rainbow of sexuality."



Former first lady of Iowa Christie Vilsack listens to an Iowa Initiative discussion with the Feminist Majority Leadership Alliance in the Iowa City Public Library on Thursday.





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