

Sally Pederson: Birth control can improve lives of young people and their families

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If you could improve a young person's odds for completing higher education, getting a good job, reducing risky sexual behavior and raising healthy children — all while saving money — would you pass up the chance? Of course not.

The fact is young adults can avoid the most common misstep in determining their future simply by preventing an unintended pregnancy.

In Iowa, almost one-half of all pregnancies among adult women age 18 to 30 are unintended — that's right, one-half. For many women and some men, an unintended pregnancy means an end to education, a dashing of dreams, and a lifetime of poverty.

We know that 60 percent of community college students who have a child after enrolling fail to complete their education. We know that women who plan their pregnancies are more likely to finish school and begin careers or marry and enjoy healthier lives.

The recent recommendation by the National Academy of Sciences' Institute of Medicine that all health insurers be required to offer contraceptive methods approved by the Food and Drug Administration without co-pays or deductibles is good news for all of us.

A recent Register editorial opposed coverage of birth control methods, but in fact, full coverage of contraceptive methods would remove a major barrier to birth control for low-income and young women — cost. And since birth control can cost less than \$300 per year, while labor, delivery and first-year services for newborns cost over \$12,000 — it makes economic sense to provide the means to prevent an unintended pregnancy.

Providing contraceptives actually saves money for both private insurance plans and public plans, a point the Register editorial missed.

Helping young people delay having children until they are prepared for the

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lifelong responsibilities of raising a child will result in healthier families and communities.

Life is complicated; birth control does not have to be.

The most effective contraceptive options, according to the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, are intrauterine devices (IUDs) and implants. These devices are much improved over earlier versions and complications are extremely rare. They are the most effective forms of birth control and are safe for use by almost all reproductive-age women.

Though the upfront costs may be higher than the monthly cost of birth control pills, implants are good for three years and IUDs are good up to 10 years, so they are far more cost-effective in the long run. Once an IUD or implant is inserted by a health professional, a woman can forget about it. There is no worry about remembering to take a daily pill. When a woman decides to have a child the IUD or implant is removed and fertility returns.

Iowa is currently involved in an effort to reduce unintended pregnancies among adult women 18-30 years old by providing better access to birth control options. Iowa can be a model for other states and the nation.

As communities look to improve the health and well-being of their neighborhoods and workplaces and to improve their quality of life, let's not forget the importance of helping young people plan and prepare for

healthy, productive futures.

That starts with access to reproductive health services as recommended by the Institute of Medicine.

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