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COMMUNITY FORUM

Go ahead and talk sex — it will save teens

BY TRACY LOUGHRIDGE

As a parent, one of my daily worries is keeping my daughters healthy and safe.

In today's world, where kids are bombarded with messages about sex constantly — online, in the media, and from their friends — our children need to learn more than ever to protect themselves as they grow up.

Nearly 750,000 American teens will become pregnant and nearly 4 million will contract a sexually transmitted infection this year alone. So I welcome

Planned Parenthood's approach to age-appropriate, comprehensive sexuality education, which highlights the importance of lifelong family communication about sexuality and encourages parents and teens to get involved.

Thankfully, this past year, President Barack Obama and Congress took a critical step to address this public health crisis. For the first time ever, there is a state-grant program that provides \$55 million for comprehensive sex education.

The program is called

PREP, and stands for Personal Responsibility Education Program.

Ultimately, the goal is to ensure that all teens and parents have access to medically accurate, age-appropriate sex education that helps reduce teen pregnancy and prevent sexually transmitted infections and helps our children get on the right path to lifelong sexual health.

In addition to helping parents and kids communicate with each other about sexuality, health and responsible decision-making, Planned Parenthood

also sponsors an innovative program through which teens are trained as peer educators to be resources in their communities for other teens who need honest, straightforward information about protecting their health.

The more young people receive open and honest answers to their questions about contraception, relationships and sexual health, the more likely they are to delay sexual activity.

Every family and every teen is different; but the good news is, study after study confirms that when

these young people do become sexually active, they are more likely to use contraception and condoms to protect themselves against pregnancy and diseases.

As a parent, talking about sex can be a tough challenge.

But the best way to keep our teens healthy and safe, and prevent teen pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections, is to educate our kids.

TRACY LOUGHRIDGE is chairwoman of Planned Parenthood of San Diego and Riverside Counties.