HOT TOPICS

Improving Childhood Asthma Outcomes

An estimated 5 million children in the United States suffer from asthma. Estimated annual costs of this disease are more than $11 billion. RAND Health assembled an interdisciplinary committee of nationally recognized experts and leaders in childhood asthma. Their mandate: to develop specific policy recommendations to help improve childhood asthma outcomes in the United States. This summary offers 11 policy recommendations for meeting their overall policy objective of promoting asthma-friendly communities nationwide.

READ MORE: How to Improve Childhood Asthma Outcomes RB-4551

Understanding the Sexual Behavior of Adolescents

Public health officials and educators have a long-standing interest in adolescent sexual behavior and risk prevention—an interest intensified by the spread of HIV. Unfortunately, understanding of adolescent sexuality is quite limited. As part of an ongoing program of research on risk behavior, RAND researchers examined the range of adolescent sexual activity. They also looked at how a condom availability program affected adolescents’ attitudes and behavior and how effectively adolescents and physicians communicate about sex-related topics.

READ MORE: Understanding the Sexual Behavior of Adolescents RB-4543

Does Early Drug Use Signal Later Problems?

The observation that adolescents who smoke also tend to have a variety of other problems is not new. But a recent series of studies by RAND Health has extended those observations to examine the long-term social consequences of smoking and using other drugs in early adolescence. The researchers found that even occasional smoking during the middle school years may contribute to later problems, including dropping out of high school.

In addition, they found that adolescents who use alcohol, cigarettes, and marijuana in the 7th grade are much more likely to commit frequent acts of predatory violence (muggings, robberies, gang assaults) 5 years later. These findings suggest that school-based programs aimed at preventing drug use may provide an added violence-reduction bonus.

READ MORE: Stopping Violence Before It Starts RB-4536
Does Early Smoking Signal Later Problems? RB-4547

Mental Health Care for Youth

Efforts to improve mental health care for children and adolescents are under way and include parity laws for private insurance and the reorganization of public services. (Parity laws mandate equal coverage for mental health and physical health care.) At the policy level, however, many of these efforts are hindered by the lack of an up-to-date, comprehensive national picture of which troubled children are getting care, how much it costs to provide it, who pays for that care, and how resources are being used.

RAND Health researchers assembled a current national picture of mental health costs and utilization for children ages 1–17. Estimated annual costs of treatment are nearly $12 billion. But on average, about three-quarters of troubled youth, especially Hispanics and African American children, don’t get needed care.

READ MORE: Mental Health Care for Youth RB-4541

FORTHCOMING STUDIES

- Modeling alternative smallpox vaccination policies
- Effects of Ephedra: science-based facts

PROJECTS UNDER WAY

- Links between alcohol advertising and underage drinking

RAND Health conducts objective research on health, health behavior, and health policy. Access to all RAND Health research is available at www.rand.org/health

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