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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

*Groundbreaking Plan Addresses Health
of California's Exploding Teen Population*
Broad Statewide Coalition Sets Forth Comprehensive Solution

San Francisco, CA, Jan. 8, 2001... Cautioning that California is unprepared to provide for the diverse health needs of its exploding teen population, a collaborative of over 40 public and private organizations today released a comprehensive statewide plan aimed at mobilizing forces across the state to resolve this critical issue.

Jointly released by the University of California, San Francisco, and the California Adolescent Health Collaborative (CAHC), the 100-page Plan represents 18 months of intensive investigation, research and deliberation by leading organizations dedicated to the welfare of youth. *Investing in Adolescent Health: A Social Imperative for California's Future*, outlines a spectrum of short and long-term strategies to ensure the health of tomorrow's workforce, parents, and leaders.

"Statistics on illness, death and risky behavior among teens provide clear evidence that we need to improve our approach to adolescent health issues," says Claire Brindis, DrPH, professor of Adolescent Medicine at UCSF. "Almost all adolescent death, illness and disability are preventable -- this plan is one of the most important steps toward addressing that crisis."

Every week in California, eight teens are murdered, nine die in motor vehicle crashes, two commit suicide and 1,139 become mothers. Dr. Brindis points out that not enough has been done to steer adolescents toward positive and healthy choices.

And while California is grappling with these issues, the state is undergoing a "youthquake," marked by a projected 34 percent climb in the teen population in the period between 1995 and 2005. By contrast, this age group will grow only 13 percent nationally.

"Our health service system for youths is already frayed at the edges," admits Margie Fites Seigle, CEO of the Los Angeles-based California Family Health Council. "As the teen population continues to mushroom, we'll

continue to fall short, leaving the next generation of California's leaders and our greatest statewide resource increasingly at risk."

The Collaborative has engaged a wide range of partners that it believes will have the capacity to create change at the state and community levels. The Plan outlines eight recommendations for a complete strategy to shore up what it sees as a woefully inadequate system for providing teens with key services and opportunities.

Adolescents currently have the lowest use of health services of any age group. The Plan calls for expansion of health services that are "youth-friendly" and located where teens will actually use them.

"Teens deserve and need a full range of health services specially designed for them," says Dr. Robert Bates from the Maternal and Child Health Branch of the California Department of Health Services. "These services must recognize that teens are no longer children; but they are still in transition to becoming fully independent adults. Teens must feel comfortable with the health services or else they will not use them."

Although health care is an important aspect of the strategic plan, it is only one component of a comprehensive approach to improving adolescent health. To create strong relationships with caring adults that reduce teens' likelihood of engaging in risky behaviors, the Plan calls for expanding state-funded programs, as well as efforts by businesses, religious organizations and individuals to connect youth with adults and community organizations, and provide mentoring and after-school activities.

"We must incorporate teens into the fabric of society," says Dr. Brindis. "Rather than marginalizing them, we need to give them a role in shaping policies that affect them." The Plan calls on cities, state boards, health programs and media outlets to establish youth advisory councils and to train youths so that they can weigh in on policy matters that affect them.

Investing in Adolescent Health is a comprehensive and far-reaching document, but the CAHC insists that implementation can begin immediately. Some of the immediate actions recommended include: enrolling all eligible teens in existing public insurance programs, inviting a youth member to sit on every school board and city council, and using part of the state's budget surplus to fund after-school programs.

"It's not like we are starting from scratch," says Fites Seigle. "There's a lot of exciting work already taking place. It's a matter of building on this work, developing a unified vision of how we can invest in youth and creating the political will to get there."

For more information on *Investing in Adolescent Health* or a downloadable copy of the Plan, visit the Web site of UCSF's National Adolescent Health Information Center at <http://youth.ucsf.edu/nahic>.