Last week, Colorado Gov. Hickenlooper announced very good news for his state. Teen birth rates had fallen 40 percent from 2009 through 2013. The drop moved Colorado from the 29th lowest teen birth rate in the nation in 2009 to the 19th lowest in 2012. He attributed the decrease to a program that helps low-income women get highly effective, long-acting reversible contraceptives.

The Colorado program, funded by an anonymous donor for five years, provided more than 30,000 intrauterine devices (IUDs) or implants at low or no cost to low-income women in 68 family planning clinics across the state.

A 2012 study published in the New England Journal of Medicine showed that these long-acting forms of contraception are 20 times better at preventing unintended pregnancies than birth control pills. Yet just 5.6 percent of women on birth control used IUDs and less than 1 percent use implants in 2010, according to CDC data. IUDs and implants can have upfront costs of $500 to $1,000, however, under the Affordable Care Act insurance plans and Medicaid are required to cover contraceptive methods without copays or deductibles. Some exceptions to this requirement are available for religious institutions and closely held businesses that object on religious grounds.

According to the governor, “The decline in births among young women served by these agencies accounted for three-quarters of the overall decline in the Colorado teen birth rate.”

In his press release, Gov. Hickenlooper says the program reduced social and economic costs to the state. The teen abortion rate dropped 35 percent from 2009 to 2012 in the counties served by the initiative. The infant caseload for WIC was reduced by 23 percent and the state saved millions of dollars associated with teen births. In total, the family planning program saved $5.68 in Medicaid costs for every dollar spent on the contraceptives the Denver Post reported.

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