



SIECUS

State Profile

PUERTO RICO

The Department of Public Health and a community-based organization in Puerto Rico received \$3,135,517 in federal funds for abstinence-only-until-marriage programs in Fiscal Year 2008.¹

Puerto Rico Sexuality Education Law and Policy

Puerto Rico's health education policy asserts that such education should lead students to develop "fundamental habits" for maintaining good health, including "respect for the human body" in order to develop positive sexual behavior.² To this end, the commonwealth provides students with information "to know, understand, and become acquainted with the development of their bodies so that they can assume their sexuality responsibly."³ Puerto Rico schools are required to implement sexuality education programs that address the "physiological and emotional aspects of sexual relations," "family responsibilities," and the health risks related to sexual relationships.⁴ The territory's sexuality education policy does not include any specific requirements to teach sexuality education that is age-appropriate, medically-accurate, or that includes information on STDs, HIV or contraception.

Puerto Rico does not require parental permission for students to participate in sexuality or HIV/AIDS education nor does it say whether parents or guardians may remove their children from such classes.

Recent Legislation

SIECUS is not aware of any proposed legislation regarding sexuality education in Puerto Rico.

Puerto Rico's Youth: Statistical Information of Note⁵

- In 2005, 44% of female high school students and 43% of male high school students in Puerto Rico reported ever having had sexual intercourse compared to 46% of female high school students and 48% of male high school students nationwide.
- In 2005, 3% of female high school students and 4% of male high school students in Puerto Rico reported having had sexual intercourse before age 13 compared to 4% of female high school students and 9% of male high school students nationwide.
- In 2005, 13% of female high school students and 13% of male high school students in Puerto Rico reported having had four or more lifetime sexual partners compared to 12% of female high school students and 17% of male high school students nationwide.

- In 2005, 35% of female high school students and 32% of male high school students in Puerto Rico reported being currently sexually active (defined as having had sexual intercourse in the three months prior to the survey) compared to 35% of female high school students and 33% of male high school students nationwide.
- In 2005, among those high school students who reported being currently sexually active, 59% of females and 74% of males in Puerto Rico reported having used condoms the last time they had sexual intercourse compared to 56% of females and 70% of males nationwide.
- In 2005, among those high school students who reported being currently sexually active, 24% of females and 23% of males in Puerto Rico reported having used birth control pills the last time they had sexual intercourse compared to 21% of females and 28% of males nationwide.
- In 2005, among those high school students who reported being currently sexually active, 16% of females and 20% of males in Puerto Rico reported having used alcohol or drugs the last time they had sexual intercourse compared to 19% of females and 28% of males nationwide.
- In 2005, 88% of high school students in Puerto Rico reported having been taught about AIDS/HIV in school compared to 88% of high school students nationwide.

Title V Abstinence-Only-Until-Marriage Funding

- Puerto Rico received \$2,537,208 in federal Title V abstinence-only-until-marriage funding in Fiscal Year 2008.
- The Title V abstinence-only-until-marriage grant requires territories to provide three territory-raised dollars or the equivalent in services for every four federal dollars received. The territory match may be provided in part or in full by local groups.
- The Puerto Rico Department of Health manages the abstinence-only-until-marriage funds, and the territory-match is made through in-kind services provided by the department of education.
- There are no sub-grantees in Puerto Rico. The department of health uses the abstinence-only-until-marriage funds to run a media campaign for the island.

Island-wide Campaign: “Ponlo en práctica” (Put It into Practice)

Puerto Rico’s statewide abstinence media campaign, “Put it Into Practice,” focuses on strengthening the communication between parents and youth about waiting for sex until marriage. The campaign is run by the Puerto Rico Abstinence Education Program (PRAEP), which is a collaboration between the departments of health and education. “Ponlo en práctica” includes print material along with radio and television ads geared toward parents that promote talking to youth about abstinence. Information included in the campaign provides parents with tips for talking with their kids, including “the earlier you speak the better,” “practice before speaking” and “explain to them the importance of abstaining.”⁶ Under the section of the website titled, “Why Abstinence?,” the website suggests to parents that pre-marital sex has significant consequences. It states that practicing abstinence ensures greater emotional health, including preventing depression and suicide attempts, and maintaining higher self-esteem. It goes on to say that abstaining from sex will allow kids to have “more successful careers and lives” and “more stable marriages.”⁷

The Puerto Rico Abstinence Education Program also provides abstinence-only-until-marriage classes to youth enrolled in public and private schools, universities, community programs, and church youth groups called “Atrévete esperar” (Dare to Wait), and sponsors after school programs. The government program contracts with teachers and health professionals to conduct the abstinence-only-until-marriage programming.⁸ In addition, PRAEP sponsored an island-wide talent show on abstinence, titled, “*Estrellas del Amor Real*” (Stars of Real Love). Similar to the format of American Idol, youth first competed in regional talent shows in which they performed songs that they wrote promoting abstinence-only-until-marriage. The winners of the regional contests later participated in the national talent show held in San Juan. The regional contest winners are recording their songs on an album, which youth will be able to download off the internet for free.⁹

Community-Based Abstinence Education (CBAE) and Adolescent Family Life Act (AFLA) Grantees

- There is one CBAE grantee in Puerto Rico: Vanguardia por la Niñez, Inc.
- There are no AFLA grantees in Puerto Rico.

Vanguardia por la Niñez, Inc. (Abstenerete Te Honra), \$598,309 (CBAE 2006–2011)

Vanguardia por la Niñez, Inc., more commonly known as *Abstenerete Te Honra (ATH)*, operates abstinence-only-until-marriage programs for middle school and high school students in 25 different schools in metropolitan San Juan, Puerto Rico. The programs use a number of abstinence-only-until-marriage curricula that have been translated into Spanish, including *Free Teens USA*, *Illusions*, *Sex Differences*, and *WAIT (Why Am I Tempted) Training*.¹⁰

SIECUS reviewed *WAIT Training* and found that it contained little medical or biological information and almost no information about STDs, including HIV/AIDS. Instead, it contains information and statistics about marriage, many of which are outdated and not supported by scientific research. It also contains messages of fear and shame and biased views of gender, sexual orientation, and family type. For example, *WAIT Training* explains, “men sexually are like microwaves and women sexually are like crockpots. . . . A woman is stimulated more by touch and romantic words. She is far more attracted by a man’s personality while a man is stimulated by sight. A man is usually less discriminating about those to whom he is physically attracted.”¹¹

The organization’s abstinence-only-until-marriage program includes a series of ten classes with a pre- and post-test. Dr. Stan Weed serves as the organization’s program evaluator. Weed was the only witness at the April 2008 Committee on Oversight and Government Reform hearing to investigate the effectiveness of federally funded abstinence-only-until-marriage programs who defended the government’s investment in those programs. By his own account, Weed has spent more than 20 years working on these issues, interviewed more than 500,000 teens, and studied more than 100 abstinence-only programs. Yet, Weed has only one published study in a peer-reviewed journal showing that abstinence-only-until-marriage programs can have any impact on sexual behavior.¹² (The program studied showed a modest impact in helping seventh graders delay sex.) Despite Weed’s insistence that abstinence-only-until-marriage funding continue, he admitted that they have not, up to this point, “done abstinence well” and repeatedly backed away from the legislatively mandated abstinence-only-until-marriage approach. Instead, he preferred the term “abstinence-centered.”

Abstenerete Te Honra also sponsors abstinence clubs for youth, which provide youth with an abstinence message through engaging them in performing arts activities. Club members participate in theater performances, talent shows, choreographed dances, and recorded video productions that promote abstinence until marriage.¹³

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The organization is closely affiliated with the larger abstinence-only-until-marriage industry. The ATH coordinator, Nydia Barreiro, is a featured Spanish Track speaker for the Abstinence Clearinghouse. The Abstinence Clearinghouse was founded by Leslee Unruh. Unruh is also the president and founder of the Alpha Center, a crisis pregnancy center, which is housed at the same location as the Abstinence Clearinghouse.

As coordinator for the abstinence program, Barreiro organizes a biannual youth abstinence talent show, “*Objetivo ATH*,” (Objective ATH). The event format is similar to “American Idol” and draws between 500 and 800 students.¹⁴

Federal and State Funding for Abstinence-Only-Until-Marriage Programs in FY 2008

Abstinence-Only-Until-Marriage Grantee Length of Grant	Amount of Grant	Type of Grant (includes Title V, CBAE, AFLA, and other funds)
Puerto Rico Department of Health www.gobierno.pr/abstinenciasexual/inicio	\$2,537,208 federal	Title V
Vanguardia por la Niñez, Inc. 2006–2011 www.vanguardiapr.com	\$598,309	CBAE

Adolescent Health Contact¹⁵

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 Puerto Rico Abstinence Only-Education Program
 Puerto Rico Department of Health
 Maternal, Infant, and Adolescent Division
 PO Box 70184
 San Juan, PR 00936-8184
 Phone: (787) 274-5698

Puerto Rico Organizations that Support Comprehensive Sexuality Education

Asociación Puertorriqueña Pro-Bienestar
de la Familia
Urbanización El Vedado
Calle Padre Las Casas
No: 117, Hato Rey
00919-2221
Puerto Rico
Phone: (787) 765 7373
www.profamiliapr.org

ACLU of Puerto Rico National
Chapter
Union Plaza Building, Suite 205
416 Avenida Ponce de Leon
San Juan, PR 00918
Phone: (787)753-8493
www.aclu-pr.org

Puerto Rico Organizations that Oppose Comprehensive Sexuality Education

Asociación Pro Derechos de la Familia
(APRODEFA)
P.O. Box 916
Guaynabo, PR 00970
Phone: (787) 272-5404
www.aprodefa.com

Centro Guadalupe Vida y
Familia
Calle 58 Sureste, No. 1289
Urbanización La Riviera
San Juan, PR 00921
Phone: (787) 504-6942

Newspapers in Puerto Rico¹⁶

Primera Hora
Newsroom
P.O. Box 2009
Cataño, PR. 00963-2009
Phone: (787) 641-5450
www.primerahora.com

El Vocero de Puerto Rico
Newsroom
PO Box 9067515
San Juan, PR 00906-7515
Phone: (787) 725-4700
www.vocero.com

¹ This refers to the federal government 's fiscal year, which begins on October 1 and ends on September 30. The fiscal year is designated by the calendar year in which it ends; for example, Fiscal Year 2008 began on October 1, 2007 and ended on September 30, 2008.

² Puerto Rico Act 70; Senate Bill 475.

³ Puerto Rico Act 68; Senate Bill 674; House Bill 847.

⁴ Puerto Rico Act 146 (2000).

⁵ Unless otherwise cited, all statistical information comes from: D. K. Eaton, et. al., "Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance—United States, 2005," Surveillance Summaries, Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report, vol. 55, no. SS-5 (9 June 2006): 1-108, accessed 19 October 2008, <<http://www.cdc.gov/HealthyYouth/yrbs/index.htm>>. Note: Puerto Rico did not participate in the 2007 YRBS.

⁶ "¿Por qué abstinencia?" Ponlo en práctica, accessed 10 November 2008, <<http://www.gobierno.pr/GenericAgencyPortal/templates/AllHtmlTemplate.aspx?NRMODE=Published&NRNODEGUID={E2F88F9D-96E0-495F-B1F2-8935A6CF0B39}&NRORIGINALURL=%2fabstinenciasexual%2finicio&NRCACHEHINT=Guest#>>>.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Personal conversation between Dr. Manuel Vargas and Morgan Marshall, 10 November 2008.

⁹ Personal conversation between Cynthia Lopez and Morgan Marshall, 13 March 2009.

¹⁰ Personal conversation between Nydia Barreiro and Morgan Marshall, 7 November 2008.

¹¹ Joneen Krauth-Mackenzie, *WAIT (Why Am I Tempted) Training, Second Edition* (Greenwood Village, CO: WAIT Training, undated). For more information, see SIECUS' review of *WAIT Training* at http://www.communityactionkit.org/curricula_reviews.html.

¹² For more information on the hearing see SIECUS' Policy Update, Committee on Oversight and Government Reform Holds First-Ever Hearings on Abstinence Only Until Marriage Programs, at <http://www.siecus.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=Feature.showFeature&featureid=1144&pageid=483&parentid=478>.

¹³ Information received from Nydia Barreiro, program coordinator for "Abstenerte Te Honra," 7 November 2008.

¹⁴ "Spanish Track Speakers," Abstinence Clearinghouse, accessed 7 November 2008, <http://www.abstinenceconference.net/espanolspeakers.asp>.

¹⁵ SIECUS has identified this person as a state-based contact for information on adolescent health and if applicable, abstinence-only-until-marriage programs.

¹⁶ This section is a list of major newspapers in your state with contact information for their newsrooms. This list is by no means exhaustive and does not contain the local level newspapers which are integral to getting your message out to your community. SIECUS strongly urges you to follow stories about the issues that concern you on the national, state, and local level by using an internet news alert service such as [Google alerts](#), becoming an avid reader of your local papers, and establishing relationships with reporters who cover your issues. For more information on how to achieve your media goals visit the SIECUS [Community Action Kit](#).