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For unmarried couples who aspire to marriage, “relationship development education” helps participants make more realistic assessments of their prospects for a healthy, long-lasting relationship.

CHARLOTTESVILLE, Va., February 10, 2014, 8:00 a.m. - High levels of divorce, cohabitation, and fragile unions, especially among the less educated in the United States, mean that unprecedented numbers of children are growing up in families without two parents in a healthy, stable relationship. This family instability poses increased risks to children’s well-being and healthy development according to “Facilitating Forever: A Feasible Public Policy Agenda to Help Couples Form and Sustain Healthy Relationships and Enduring Marriages”, a new report sponsored by the [National Marriage Project at the University of Virginia](#).

Federal and state governments have been aware of the challenges of family instability for decades. Recently, this concern has cut refreshingly across party lines. The Bush and now Obama administrations have funded programs to help couples form and sustain healthy relationships and enduring marriages. These programs support “relationship literacy education” initiatives, consisting of voluntary, community-based educational programs that teach youth, young adults, cohabitating couples, and engaged and young married couples what healthy relationships look like and the skills to make them work.

"Clearly, the initial evidence is mixed when it comes to evaluating relationship programs," said W. Bradford Wilcox, director of the [National Marriage Project](#). "But this important new report points to signs of success--in Oklahoma, the military, and California--that suggest carefully designed programs can help to stabilize the increasingly fragile foundations of American family life."

The report is authored by Alan Hawkins of Brigham Young University and family writer Betsy VanDenBerghe. “My hope is that this report can help people understand how and why their taxpayer dollars are being used to try to help couples form and sustain healthy relationships and enduring marriages,” Hawkins said. “Of course, I think there are some improvements we can make to increase the effectiveness of these programs. And their long-term success is unknown. But overall, as a result of this report, I hope that debate about the merits of these policy initiatives can be more productive.”

“Facilitating Forever” documents federal and state policy experiments designed to help couples form and sustain healthy relationships and enduring marriages. It reviews the research to date on how effective these efforts have been and responds to legitimate concerns about them. The authors specifically advocate the following policies:

1. Transferring direction of healthy marriages and relationships initiatives (HMRI) from the federal government to states
2. Downsizing the current policy that awards federal grants to a variety of community organizations delivering educational services and reallocating most of those funds to reimburse states
3. Supplementing TANF funds by setting aside \$10-20 of each marriage license fee
4. Using state-directed funds to support a strategic set of relationship education services delivered by community organizations targeted primarily to young at-risk individuals and couples

The **National Marriage Project**, founded in 1997 at Rutgers University, is a nonpartisan, nonsectarian and interdisciplinary initiative now located at the University of Virginia. The project’s mission is to provide research and analysis on the health of marriage in America, to analyze the social and cultural forces shaping contemporary marriage, and to identify strategies to increase marital quality and stability.

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