Sexual risk behaviors of our teens, and the accompanying economic and public health implications, are a growing concern. Sexually transmitted infections (STIs) traditionally affect individuals of all ages, however, STIs are taking a particularly heavy toll on young people aged 15-24. The CDC estimates that youths aged 15-24 accounted for almost half of the 26 million new sexually transmitted infections that occurred in the United States in 2018 (CDC, 2021a). Childhood maltreatment, sexual abuse in particular, has been found to be associated with sexual risk behaviors later in life (London et al., 2017).

- In 2018, 21% of new HIV diagnoses were among young people aged 13-24; 12% young women, 88% young men (CDC, 2021b).
- From 2014–2016, syphilis rates increased by 24.5% among adolescents aged 15–19 years and 25.4% among young adults aged 20–24 years. Primary and secondary syphilis infections have seen the most dramatic increase, with total national rates at their highest since 1993 (Shannon & Klausner, 2018).
- Adolescents are more likely to engage in high-risk sexual behavior, due in part to the prefrontal cortex, responsible for executive function, not being fully developed (Steinberg, 2005).
- In 2018, 180,000 babies were born to girls aged 15-19 (CDC, 2021b). Substance use in adolescence is associated with risky sexual behaviors that lead to STI’s, pregnancy, and HIV.

- The direct lifetime medical costs in the United States of new STIs in 2018 totaled nearly $16 billion (CDC, 2021c).
- Technology is compounding the problem of STIs in the United States with the use of dating apps such as Tinder. According to Dr. Chin-Hong, The “Tinder effect” has made it easier for people to meet and have multiple sexual exposures which increase risk of STIs (Chin-Hong et al., 2017).
- Letourneau et al (2018) conducted a study to estimate the U.S. economic impact of child sexual abuse (CSA). Their findings showed the total lifetime economic burden of child sexual abuse was estimated to be at least $9.3 billion (CDC, 2021d; Letourneau et al., 2018).
  - The lifetime cost for victims of fatal CSA victims is approximately $1.2 million.
- The average lifetime cost for victims of nonfatal CSA is $282,734 per female victim, and $74,691 per male victim (Letourneau et al., 2018).
  - The article suggested that prevention programming is still a need that is not being addressed and could prove cost-effective (Letourneau et al., 2018).
  - According to data collected from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, results suggest that a history of forced sex is independently associated with a history of STIs among sexually active adolescent girls and strategies aimed at STI reduction must address sexual victimization (Upchurch & Kusunoki, 2004).
  - The EARN IT Act would go a long way in the prevention of child sexual abuse material (CSAM) from causing irrefutable harm to child survivors by continual revictimization — furthermore, impacting the economy by decreasing healthcare costs, recidivism, and associated government subsidies.