The mission of the March of Dimes is to improve the health of babies by preventing birth defects and infant mortality.

The March of Dimes carries out this mission through programs of research, community services, education and advocacy to save babies’ lives.
Fifty years ago, on April 26, 1954, the historic field trial of the Salk polio vaccine began at a small elementary school in McLean, Va. Supported and implemented by the March of Dimes, it eventually involved nearly 2 million schoolchildren — called Polio Pioneers — and was the largest mobilization of volunteers in peacetime history.

One year later, on April 12, 1955, the vaccine was declared “safe, effective and potent” against polio. The nation breathed a collective sigh of relief. Church bells tolled and people took to the streets in celebration. Children would now be safe from the devastation of poliomyelitis. Massive immunization programs commenced across the United States and other nations.
Building on Success

"I’m so proud that my grandfather’s legacy is being carried on so powerfully and so successfully."

Anna Eleanor Roosevelt, granddaughter of Franklin Roosevelt

The success of the Salk polio vaccine was the culmination of the dream envisioned by Franklin Delano Roosevelt when he founded the March of Dimes in 1938. A dream realized through the innovative and exhaustive research of Dr. Jonas Salk. A dream supported and fostered by the American people with spirit, determination and generosity.

Since the victory over polio, this alliance of volunteerism and science has proven to be an effective model for success as the March of Dimes works to protect our nation’s young from birth defects, premature birth and other threats to their health. Millions of babies have been saved from death or disability. And we still work toward the day when every baby has the best possible chance to be born healthy. We continue to build today’s victories on the successes of the past.
A highly focused effort to drive revenue growth in 2004 enabled the March of Dimes to increase our investment in mission activities. Our thanks for the hard work and dedication of our volunteers and staff, the generosity of our donors, and their commitment to improving infant health. In the following pages, you will find an account of mission activities, all aimed at improving the health of our newborns.

Fighting Prematurity
The March of Dimes National Prematurity Campaign, in its 2nd year, aims to stem the growing crisis in premature births. The key to achieving this ambitious goal is research. In 2004, the March of Dimes created a new Prematurity Research Initiative to supplement our current research portfolio of investments in studies of key questions in developmental biology related to causes of death and disability in newborns.

On the legislative front, the March of Dimes continued to advocate for increased federal funding for prematurity research and expansion of health care coverage for pregnant women. We expect these bills to be reintroduced into the 109th Congress with more than 100 cosponsors.

For families with premature or sick babies who are being treated in neonatal intensive care units (NICU), we continued to provide information and emotional support through our NICU Family Support project. Now in 13 cities, NICU Family Support will reach every state by 2007.

Newborn Screening
Newborn screening tests are vitally important for diagnosing certain disorders that could result in death or serious illness if not treated early. Yet two-thirds of America’s babies don’t get the most basic of these tests. The foundation supports the uniform panel of conditions recommended by the American College of Medical Genetics, and urges these tests be adopted nationwide so that all babies, wherever they’re born, will benefit. As the result of March of Dimes efforts, 15 states expanded their screening programs in 2004.

Genetic Advances
Building on our pioneering history in genetics research, March of Dimes grantees identified a gene related to cleft lip and palate, opening the way to developing treatments and preventions for these disfiguring and disabling birth defects. Oral clefts affect between 1 in 1,000 and 1 in 2,000 births, depending on the type of cleft.

Folic Acid
Our work to reduce neural tube birth defects with folic acid continued in 2004. The number of women who take the B vitamin reached an all-time high of 40 percent, up from 32 percent in 1995. Over that period, the incidence of neural tube defects decreased 25 percent, thanks to increased consumption of folic acid.

Saving Babies Here and Abroad
In communities across the nation, March of Dimes chapters invested in programs for local families, including access to early prenatal care, preterm labor prevention, and outreach to diverse communities. Internationally, the March of Dimes is partnering with organizations in 19 countries to educate local health care professionals in perinatal health and primary care genetics.

Funding the Mission
In 2004, total public support and revenue was $224.4 million, an increase of $6.9 million over 2003. The year brought the most successful WalkAmerica in the event’s 35-year history: $96.7 million. The special events portfolio also increased to $39.9 million. Direct mail ($50.6 million), Mothers March ($18.2 million) and Major Gifts, including bequests, President’s Society and government grants ($18.8 million), all held their own.

Building on Success
2004 marked the 50th anniversary of the initiation of the Salk vaccine field trials. On April 26, we celebrated with an event at Franklin Sherman Elementary School in McLean, Va., the site of the “first shot.”

On April 12, 2005, we will commemorate the momentous announcement that the Salk vaccine was “safe, effective and potent” against polio. This success was a victory for science and a tribute to the spirit and generosity of the American people. That unique partnership of science and volunteerism is the foundation on which Franklin Roosevelt established the March of Dimes. And it is the foundation upon which we have built 50 years of subsequent successes in the fight to save babies.

As we look to the future, we continue to take inspiration from the words of our founder, Franklin Roosevelt: “The only limit to our realization of tomorrow will be our doubts of today. Let us move forward with strong and active faith.”

President

Chairman of the Board
Birth of Molecular Biology

In 1951, the March of Dimes funded a grant to Dr. James D. Watson, a 23-year-old virology researcher from the US, to uncover the structure of DNA, the molecule that contains our genes. Working in Cambridge, England, with Francis Crick, Watson used metal rods and pieces resembling Tinkertoys to assemble models of possible solutions. With no success and no metal pieces remaining, Watson cut out cardboard pieces shaped like the four chemicals (nucleotides) in DNA (A, C, T and G) and found that, when placed side by side, A and T had the same shape as C and G. This famous “Aha!” enabled Watson and Crick to identify the double helix structure of DNA. In February 1953, the pair burst into the nearby Eagle Pub and announced to startled patrons that they had discovered “the secret of life.” Their findings revolutionized the study of biology and earned them the Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine (with Maurice Wilkins, PhD) in 1962.

New Gene Test May Provide Answers

Children with oral clefts — openings or separations involving the upper lip, roof of the mouth, or tissue in the back of the mouth — have difficulty chewing, swallowing and speaking. They may have frequent ear infections or hearing loss. Even with corrective surgery, problems may linger. Now, a research team including March of Dimes grantees may offer new hope. Eduardo E. Castilla, MD, PhD, of ECLAMC, a birth defects research program in Brazil, Andrew Lidral, DDS, PhD, of the University of Iowa, and Mauricio Arcos-Burgos of the University of Antioquia in Colombia, studied nearly 2,000 families of Asian, European and South American descent who had a history of clefts. They found that parents with a gene called IRF6 were three times more likely to have a 2nd affected child than parents without IRF6. As a result of their work, a new genetic screening test may be developed to help predict a couple’s likelihood of having another child with a cleft. Ongoing research may one day lead to treatments or preventions for these disorders.
2004 “We’re bringing parents together.”

Special Support for Families
Thrust into the world of the neonatal intensive care unit (NICU) for a baby born prematurely or sick, families often struggle to understand and cope with the turmoil. That’s where the March of Dimes NICU Family Support project comes in — with vital information packaged in a special Parent Care Kit, and with emotional support through direct services to families in crisis. One way bilingual NICU Family Support Specialist Michele Pierson assists families at Parkland Memorial Hospital in Dallas is by helping them create a keepsake of their baby’s progress in the NICU. Pierson says, “We offer a creative way to deal with the mixed emotions of love, hope and fear.” In Greenville, S.C., Rachel Balck helps older brothers and sisters understand the NICU through medical play, crafts and special “sibling care kits.” Now in 13 cities, the NICU Family Support project will reach hospitals in every state by 2007. The March of Dimes also has launched marchofdimes.com/share. With more than 3,000 registered users to date, this special online community is a place where families can share their stories and connect with others who understand.

“Safe, Effective, Potent.”

On April 12, 1955, these three words rang out across a relieved and jubilant nation, setting off a symphony of church bells and car horns. The vaccine developed by March of Dimes grantee Dr. Jonas Salk had been put to the test — and had passed! A huge volunteer army from all walks of life had helped with the field trial, including nearly 2 million schoolchildren known as Polio Pioneers. Next, the March of Dimes organized a massive volunteer effort to ensure that vaccinations reached American children. The Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) and its Ladies Auxiliaries, the US Marine Corps, and Parent Teachers Associations assisted polio patients and their families, raised funds, transported iron lungs, educated the public — and even handed out lollipops to children getting vaccinated. Ultimately, the Salk vaccine reduced the rate of polio by 97 percent — a victory for science and for every March of Dimes volunteer who helped to fight the good fight.

Community programs support the diverse needs of local families and babies. March of Dimes chapters committed nearly $8.6 million in grants and awards to local organizations that help moms get prenatal care and vital information about having a healthy pregnancy.

In partnership with JN Medical College in the Belgaum District of South India, the March of Dimes is working to address the country’s infant mortality rate — 63 per 1,000 live births, one of the highest in the world — by training local health care professionals (shown above) to improve prenatal care and maternal health.

The Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, a March of Dimes national partner, held its 2nd annual “Zeta Prematurity Awareness Sunday” on November 14. This year’s event spread the word about the crisis of premature birth to hundreds of houses of worship reaching more than 100,000 people across the country.

In 1955 “We’re helping those in need.”

2004 “We’re bringing parents together.”
A Nationwide Call for Action

In November, landmarks, buildings and bridges from Niagara Falls to the State Capital Dome in Cheyenne, Wyo., lit up in pink and blue as a symbol of hope for the nearly half a million premature babies born every year. Volunteers from coast to coast joined celebrities and families of babies born too soon to support the March of Dimes effort to raise awareness of the growing crisis of premature birth. Brochures in English and Spanish helped women learn the signs of preterm labor. More than 20,000 people signed an online petition calling for increased federal funding for research. On Prematurity Awareness Day, celebrities (center photo left) Laurie Hibberd Gelman, Michael Gelman, Dr. Joy Browne, Maysa Leak and Holly Marie Combs gave their time to call the nation to action.

2004 “We’re raising awareness of premature birth.”

A record 40 percent of women of childbearing age now report taking a daily multivitamin containing folic acid, a B vitamin that helps prevent neural tube birth defects, according to the latest Gallup survey commissioned by the March of Dimes. The rate of NTDs was decreased 25 percent between 1995 and 2002.

Univision Television Network produced targeted public service advertisements and news stories that helped the March of Dimes reach Hispanic women with vital information about preparing for pregnancy. These segments, part of Univision’s broad health initiative called ¡Salud es Vida… Entérate!, directed viewers to the March of Dimes Spanish Web site nacersano.org.

In January the March of Dimes launched its Healthy Babies Healthy Business® Web site (marchofdimes.com/hbhb). The site provides company Intranets and wellness programs with the latest high-quality pregnancy and newborn health information at no cost.

EDUCATION

2004 “We’re translating science into prevention.”

GOVERNMENTAL WARNING:

ACCORDING TO THE SURGEON GENERAL, WOMEN SHOULD NOT DRINK ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGES DURING PREGNANCY BECAUSE OF THE RISK OF BIRTH DEFECTS.

Dr. Kenneth Lyons Jones, 1977
Dr. David W. Smith, 1975

Linking Alcohol and Birth Defects

At the Harborview Hospital in Seattle, Wash., in 1973, March of Dimes grantees Drs. Kenneth Lyons Jones and David W. Smith were the first to link drinking alcohol during pregnancy to a specific pattern of birth defects and mental retardation they called fetal alcohol syndrome (FAS). In response, the March of Dimes mobilized to educate women about this preventable cause of birth defects through brochures, fact sheets and health education programs at work sites and schools. Volunteers were successful in getting federal, state and local governments to post warning signs wherever alcohol was sold or served and to put warning labels on alcohol bottles. FAS is the most common preventable birth defect. Through March of Dimes continuing efforts, there has been a reduction in the number of pregnant women who drink alcohol.

2002 – 2004 National Ambassadors

Celebrities fight prematurity

Wilson Building, Washington, DC

2004 – 2004 National Ambassadors

2004 “We’re raising awareness of premature birth.”
Dr. Robert Guthrie: Crusader in Newborn Screening

Many parents are unaware that their newborns have had a simple blood test at birth, mandated by law, which could improve or save their baby’s life. They have March of Dimes grantee Dr. Robert Guthrie to thank for his work in developing a simple, inexpensive test to detect and treat PKU (phenylketonuria), a disorder that can cause mental retardation. Today, all states screen for PKU. Guthrie, twice nominated for a Nobel Prize, later developed screening tests for other genetic disorders — and traveled the world to advocate for newborn screening. His resolve to make the PKU test affordable and widely available has resulted in screening for more than 300 million babies in the US and worldwide, and led to early treatment and improved outcomes for thousands of affected children and their families. The March of Dimes continues his legacy by urging states to expand their newborn screening programs to include additional tests that help save babies.

A Preventable Tragedy

In August 2000, 2-year-old Ben Haygood of Belden, Miss., showed signs of a mild “stomach virus.” He died 12 hours later. Nearly a month passed before doctors told his parents, Robin and Vince, that the rare hereditary disease that killed him (called medium-chain acyl-CoA dehydrogenase deficiency or MCAD) could have been detected at birth by a $25 blood test. The Haygoods channeled their grief into activism, lobbying state legislators to address the problem. As a result, a new law, named for Ben, has been enacted to broaden the state’s screening program to cover 40 conditions. The March of Dimes now urges all states to test for 29 conditions. Thanks to the ongoing efforts of March of Dimes volunteers, other groups, and parents like the Haygoods, at least another 15 states are or will be expanding their newborn screening programs.

2004 “Expanded screening saves lives.”

Former Gov. Musgrove signs Ben’s Bill

Robin and Vince Haygood

Newborn screening

Former Gov. Musgrove signs Ben’s Bill
The First WalkAmerica

On October 7, 1970, March of Dimes volunteers in San Antonio, Texas, led by honorary chair Dr. Kenneth Cooper decided to try a new way to raise money — the first-ever walking event. They called it “Pledgewalk.” One month later, in Columbus, Ohio, walk chair John Glenn and others followed suit. Despite a cold rain and bone-chilling winds, 500 walkers in Columbus pledged a remarkable $64,687 to support the March of Dimes mission — an auspicious beginning to the event that would become known as WalkAmerica. Thirty-four years later, WalkAmerica continues to be the nation’s best-loved walk. In 2004, nearly half a million walkers in 1,100 communities across the nation helped raise a record $96.7 million. Total dollars raised since its inception: $1.5 billion to support research and programs that save babies.

Erin Williams: WalkAmerica Pioneer

Sixteen-year-old Erin Williams knows about premature birth firsthand. Her cousin Ashley was born too small and too sick to survive. Her newest cousins, triplets born four months early, won their difficult battle with premature birth with the help of March of Dimes advances. Erin wanted to help the March of Dimes save babies, so she set out to create her own WalkAmerica in her hometown of Perry, Okla. She recruited volunteers from schools and civic clubs, church groups, friends and family. Erin’s determination and vision helped this small town raise more than $17,000 in 2004. Today, Erin aspires to be a neonatologist and serve on the front lines of the fight to save premature babies.

2004 “The March of Dimes helped save my cousins.”
PARTNERS

Thank you to our national 2004 WalkAmerica Sponsors.

“Kmart has been the leader in raising money for the March of Dimes to save babies because we believe so deeply in that mission. Our customers and associates have been amazing in their passion, and for over 20 years they have raised money, supported the WalkAmerica program, and most of all, cared.”
— Dene Rogers
Senior Vice President, Stores
Kmart Corporation

No company has done more for America’s babies than Kmart. Since 1984, Kmart associates and customers have raised an unprecedented $43.8 million to help the March of Dimes save babies—including $23.5 million through its in-store WalkAmerica sneaker promotion. In 2004, the company’s 20th year as the #1 team in the nation among 20,000 participating companies, the Kmart team raised nearly $5 million.

“CIGNA returned for its 10th consecutive year as a national sponsor of March of Dimes WalkAmerica. Since 1994, CIGNA and its employees have contributed $16 million to the March of Dimes. In WalkAmerica 2004, CIGNA ranked as the #6 team in the nation, among 20,000 participating companies raising more than $1.5 million. CIGNA is also a founding sponsor of the March of Dimes Prematurity Campaign.

“Discovery Health Channel, the television network that takes viewers inside the fascinating and informative world of health and medicine, returned to the March of Dimes. In 2004, Discovery Health Channel was the national WalkAmerica sponsor. By airing news stories and public service advertisements, they helped the March of Dimes raise awareness of the crisis of prematurity birth.

“No one has supported the March of Dimes more than Famous Footwear Corporation, a $5 million leader for 16 consecutive years. Since 1994, Famous Footwear has raised more than $940,000 to help meet the challenges of prematurity and birth defects.

“We are extremely proud of our partnership with the March of Dimes. This is a wonderful opportunity for Discovery Health Channel and the March of Dimes to combine resources and further generate awareness of the prevalence of preterm birth nationwide. We are delighted to have Discovery Health Channel Stories conducting in-store fund-raising initiatives to customers in April benefiting March of Dimes WalkAmerica.”
— H. Edward Hanway
Chairman and
Chief Executive Officer
CIGNA Corporation

“The March of Dimes provides invaluable research and services for families dealing with prematurity and birth defects. We are truly proud to support the March of Dimes in our communities.”
— Joe Wood
President
Famous Footwear

The March of Dimes welcomed Famous Footwear for its 2nd year as a national sponsor of March of Dimes WalkAmerica. Wisconsin-based Famous Footwear, America’s largest footwear chain selling branded, value-priced footwear for the entire family, became the exclusive national sponsor in the footwear category in 2003. Conducting fund-raising promotions in its more than 900 stores, Famous Footwear raised more than $940,000 in 2004 to support March of Dimes lifesaving research and programs.

“Famous Footwear is among America’s largest footwear chains and is proud to support March of Dimes. The March of Dimes’ national Premier Sponsors, including Famous Footwear, are making a difference in the health of children and families across the country.”
— John L. Fryer
Chief Executive Officer
Famous Footwear

With generous support from

Thank you to our NICU Family Support national sponsors.

Thank you to our Prematurity Awareness Month sponsors.

Additional support provided by Dey, L.P.

Contributing to Success
In 2004, gross contributions to the March of Dimes included:

- WalkAmerica $97 million
- Special Events $40 million
- Mail Donations $51 million
- Mothers March $19 million
- Major Gifts, including Bequests, President’s Society and government grants $19 million