

SUMMARY STATEMENT

The mission of the Pennsylvania Department of Health (Department) is to promote healthy behaviors, prevent injury and disease, and to assure the safe delivery of quality healthcare for all people in Pennsylvania. Throughout 2020, the Department has prioritized collaboration with agency and community partners to identify opportunities for improvement in policies, healthcare, and social services to build capacity for improving maternal and infant outcomes. The Department also recognizes the importance of addressing the root causes of racial disparities in maternal and infant mortality and is committed to changing the systems that perpetuate disparities to achieve health equity in the commonwealth.

ACTIVITIES AND RESULTS

The Department continues to take action to improve maternal and infant outcomes in the commonwealth. In partnership with state and community stakeholders throughout the commonwealth, the Department completed the Title V Maternal and Child Health Services Block Grant (MCHSBG) Needs and Capacity Assessment in 2020. As a result of the Needs and Capacity Assessment, the Department identified maternal and child population priorities, including reducing maternal mortality and morbidity and reducing infant mortality, especially where there are inequities. These priorities lay the foundation for strategies and initiatives to be funded by the MCHSBG and implemented during at least the next five years. Strategies that are currently underway include support for building capacity to implement the CenteringPregnancy model of group prenatal care, and home visiting services for people who are pregnant or parenting.

In 2020, Pennsylvania's Department of Human Services expanded home visiting services for infants who are insured by Medicaid. Parents or caregivers of Medical Assistance-enrolled infants are eligible for at least two home visits to be provided during pregnancy or postpartum. The home visits are individualized to the needs of the family. The first two visits focus on ensuring the parent or caregiver and infant receive recommended health care, completing assessments to identify any risks or needs and making referrals to appropriate services to address those risks or needs.

In recent years, Pennsylvania has started building capacity to address maternal morbidity and mortality through the work of several collaborative initiatives focused on quality improvement. The Pennsylvania Maternal Mortality Review Committee (MMRC), established in 2018, is working to systematically review all maternal deaths, identify root causes of the deaths and develop strategies to reduce preventable morbidity, mortality and racial disparities related to pregnancy in Pennsylvania. The Pennsylvania Perinatal Quality Collaborative (PA PQC), launched in 2019, has recruited 65 birth hospitals and neonatal intensive care units (NICUs), representing 87% of live births, and 14 health plans across the commonwealth to join the effort to reduce maternal mortality and improve care for pregnant and postpartum women and newborns affected by opioids. As of October 1, 2020, Pennsylvania became the 38th state to join the Alliance for Innovation in Maternal Health (AIM). The Pennsylvania AIM Task Force is working to implement the AIM Severe Hypertension patient safety bundle, with a focus on racial disparities. Pennsylvania has also received the Pritzker Children's Initiative Implementation grant, to support a public-private partnership for advocacy and policy work to improve access to high quality services, including evidence-based home visiting and services to address maternal depression and anxiety.

COVID RELATED WORK

The Department has taken extraordinary measures to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 and save lives. As part of the response measures, the Department has taken action to ensure that pregnant and nursing people receive supportive care in safe and respectful environments.

Throughout the pandemic, Department has worked with hospitals and birthing facilities to balance the implementation of infectious control measures with providing dignified and respectful care for patients in labor and delivery. On April 2 and August 20, 2020, the Department sent letters to maternal health providers, including obstetricians and gynecologists,

administrators of birthing hospitals, and midwives, encouraging alignment with recommendations from the CDC, World Health Organization (WHO), and the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) on caring for pregnant patients during the pandemic. Additionally, the Department advocated for the inclusion of support person(s) in labor and delivery through updates to the Guidance on Hospitals' Responses to COVID-19. Through the hospital guidance, the Department recommends that facilities, through their visitor policies, allow for the presence of a support person for patients in labor and delivery, and the presence of a doula, in addition to a patient's support person, in labor and delivery.

The Department has continued to provide services and education to pregnant people during the pandemic. Pennsylvania home visiting programs, funded by MCHSBG and the Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) have adapted services to a virtual model in order to continue to provide support during pregnancy or early childhood while maintaining safety precautions for staff and families alike. Additionally, the Department developed guidance for pregnant and nursing people during COVID-19. The [guidance documents](#) include information about the risks associated with COVID-19 for pregnant people and infants, as well as recommendations for how to prevent spreading the virus and protect pregnant people and their families.