

Sponsors



Sen. Katie Boyd
Britt (R-AL)



Sen. Cory Booker
(D-NJ)



Rep. Lauren
Underwood (D-IL)



Rep. Brian
Fitzpatrick (R-PA)

Background

The U.S. has one of **the highest maternal mortality rates** in the developed world.¹ In 2019, the National Institutes of Health (NIH) launched the IMPROVE initiative to respond to the nation's high rates of pregnancy-related complications and deaths. However, this program lacks a sustained funding source, threatening critical research on maternal health outcomes.

Facts on maternal health outcomes in the U.S.



In 2024, **nearly 650 moms died** due to pregnancy-related causes (17.9 per 100,000).²

32k

Annually, more than **32,000 women experience life-threatening complications** due to labor and delivery.³



Over 80% of maternal deaths are determined to be **preventable**.⁴



The **leading underlying causes** of pregnancy-related deaths are cardiovascular diseases (including hypertension-related complications), mental health conditions, severe bleeding, infection, and embolism.⁵



22.5% of all pregnancy-related deaths are related to a mental health.⁶



Over 35% of counties are considered **maternity care deserts** — places where there is no access to birthing hospitals, birth centers offering obstetric care, or obstetric providers.⁷ States with high prevalence of maternity care deserts had 36% greater risk of maternal mortality.⁸



Racial disparities persist — **Black women and American Indian/Alaska Native women are, respectively, 3 and 4 times more likely to experience pregnancy-related deaths** than white women.⁴

Bill summary

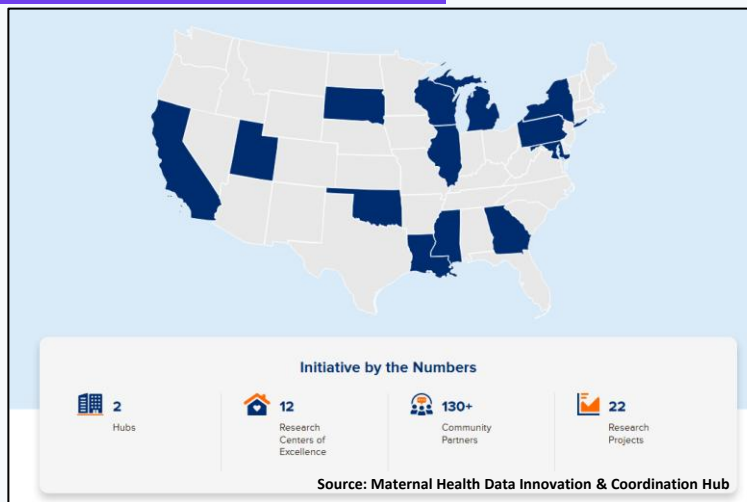
The bipartisan **NIH IMPROVE Act would authorize consistent funding** ensuring federal support for programs that develop evidence-based research and approaches to **improving maternal health outcomes, addressing maternal mortality, and reducing health disparities**.

The initiative prioritizes research on leading causes of maternal death, including socioeconomic factors and biological factors like cardiovascular disease, infection, and hemorrhage.

Key funding authorizations:

- The NIH IMPROVE Act would authorize **\$73.4 million** from FY 2026 through 2031 to carry out the IMPROVE initiative, supporting research that:
 - Investigates potential causes of maternal morbidity and severe maternal morbidity (SMM), such as prenatal rates of care;
 - Reduces preventable cases of maternal mortality and SMM;
 - Targets disparities in maternal health outcomes; and
 - Improves care and health outcomes for women before, during, and after pregnancy, especially in maternal care deserts.

Maternal Health Research Centers of Excellence



References:

1. The Commonwealth Fund. (n.d.). Insights into the U.S. Maternal Mortality Crisis: An international comparison. Insights into the U.S. Maternal Mortality Crisis: An International Comparison. <https://www.commonwealthfund.org/publications/issue-briefs/2024/jun/insights-us-maternal-mortality-crisis-international-comparison>
2. Hoyert, D. (2026, March 4). Maternal mortality rates in the United States, 2024. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/hestat/hestat113.htm>
3. Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality. Healthcare Cost and Utilization Project (HCUP) Fast Stats. Severe Maternal Morbidity Among In-Hospital Deliveries. <https://datatools.ahrq.gov/hcup-fast-stats/?tab=special-emphasis&dash=92>
4. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (n.d.). Pregnancy-related deaths: Data from Maternal Mortality Review Committees. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. <https://www.cdc.gov/maternal-mortality/php/data-research/mmr/index.html?cove-tab=4>
5. The Commonwealth Fund. (n.d.). Maternal mortality in the United States, 2025 | commonwealth fund. Maternal Mortality in the United States, 2025. <https://www.commonwealthfund.org/publications/issue-briefs/2025/jul/maternal-mortality-united-states-2025>
6. CDC. Pregnancy-Related Deaths: Data from Maternal Mortality Review Committees. <https://www.cdc.gov/maternal-mortality/php/data-research/mmr/index.html?cove-tab=1>
7. March of Dimes. (2024). Nowhere to Go: Maternity Care Deserts across the US 2024 report. <https://www.marchofdimes.org/peristats/assets/s3/reports/2024-Maternity-Care-Report.pdf>
8. Atwani, R., Robbins, L., Saade, G., & Kawakita, T. (2025). Association of Maternity Care Deserts With Maternal and Pregnancy-Related Mortality. *Obstetrics and gynecology*, 146(2), 181–188.