

**Department of Family Science
School of Public Health**

**Study of Mortality Rates of
African American Infants and
Infants in Rural Areas**



**UNIVERSITY OF
MARYLAND**

Legislatively Mandated Study- Chapter 83 of 2018 State Laws of Maryland

The statute requires that MHCC--

1. examine factors, beyond the known factors of low birth weight, teen pregnancy, poor nutrition, and lack of prenatal care, affecting African American infants and infants in rural areas;
 2. research programs that have aimed to reduce the infant mortality rate;
 3. make recommendations on ways to reduce the mortality rate;
 4. make recommendations on use of pregnancy navigators/ community health workers;
 5. make legislative recommendations regarding the establishment of a permanent council on infant mortality; and
 6. make recommendations regarding methods to reduce the costs associated with low birth weight infants and with infant mortality.
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Study Process

- FMSC contracted for research, meeting management, report preparation:
 - 3 literature reviews*
 - inventory of MD programs*
 - qualitative interviews with key informant providers*
- Workgroup of stakeholders
- Engagement with MD DOH entities

Theme: Care Coordination

- Improve existing care coordination processes and tools
- Care coordination should include programs to address social determinants of health, including the impact of racism and bias.
- Implement rigorous implicit racial bias training in relevant health care providers' education and clinical practices
- Strengthen coordination of care by assessment and referral to necessary mental health and substance use disorder treatment programs

Theme: Care Coordination

- Improve continuity of care.
- Increase adoption of breastfeeding prior to hospital discharge and support continuation through the first year of life.
- Health care providers, community health workers, and other organizations should enhance patient education on pregnancy spacing.

Theme: Expanding and Enhancing Access and Utilization of Services

1. Expand and improve home visiting programs throughout the state to improve maternal and infant health.
2. Increase adoption of evidence-based group prenatal care programs
3. Enhance the use of telehealth to provide care in rural communities
4. State and local health agencies should invest in an infant mortality prevention health literacy initiative across sectors to create an informed and activated community of residents, health and social service providers, and facilities.
5. Continue investment in safe sleep education and increase investment in safe sleep resources.

Theme: Need for a Sustained and Centralized Focus on Infant Mortality

Establish a permanent council focused on disparities in infant and maternal mortality. Potential responsibilities could include:

1. Facilitating cross-sector collaboration.
2. Establishing regular reporting requirements to monitor and assess progress.
3. Identifying funding needs and advocating for allocation of new and sustainable funding sources.
4. Working with MDH to identify areas where IM rates are highest to focus resources.
5. Fostering support for counties to develop their own models to reduce disparities.
6. Evaluating current programs and outreach.
7. Determining future needs, including workforce development.

Next Steps

- Report approved by the MD Health Care Commission October 17, 2019
- Final report delivered to the MD Senate Finance Committee and the House Government Operations Committee on November 1, 2019

Report Links

- https://mhcc.maryland.gov/mhcc/pages/home/workgroups/workgroups_african_american_rural.aspx

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