

Structural Inequities Burden Mothers/Parents, Infants, and Families of Color: Support Policies that Reduce Disparities in Health Outcomes

The Issue:

The U.S. has the highest maternal mortality, neonatal mortality, and infant mortality rates among all developed countries and is the only country where the maternal mortality rate is increasing instead of decreasing. Stark racial and ethnic disparities persist in rates of pregnancy complications, pregnancy-related deaths, preterm and premature birth, infant mortality, SUID and SIDS. In the U.S. today, African American women are three to four times more likely to die from pregnancy-related causes and have a preterm birth rate nearly 50 percent higher than white women.

Maternal, infant, and child health outcomes, including breastfeeding rates, are impacted by issues of intersectionality. Deep inequities in social determinants of health, structural racism, and the lack of access to health care and preventive services are among the many factors impacting outcomes in communities of color and low-income communities. Policy changes are needed to influence upstream determinants of health and address the inequities that keep too many families of color from achieving their full potential.

Breastfeeding is the optimal source of nutrition and immune protection for babies, and a robust source of primary prevention for many infant and maternal conditions. The American Academy of Pediatrics strongly states that infant feeding should no longer be considered a lifestyle choice, but rather a public health imperative because of the many short and long-term benefits to mother and child.

Current Status and Opportunities for Action:

- **Mothers and Offspring Mortality and Morbidity Awareness (MOMMA's) Act (S. 916/H.R. 1897)**

The Mothers and Offspring Mortality and Morbidity Awareness Act or the MOMMA's Act would address the high rates of maternal and infant mortality and outcome disparities. The bill offers a comprehensive approach, providing funding and technical assistance to state-based programs addressing maternal and infant health, including breastfeeding support, and extending Medicaid and Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) eligibility for postpartum women. By ensuring that families have access to the health services they need, the 116th Congress can create lasting change in the lives of families.

- **Health Equity and Accountability Act (forthcoming in the 116th Congress)**

The Health Equity and Accountability Act, introduced during past Congressional Sessions, features several comprehensive strategies aimed at eliminating racial and ethnic health disparities in order to achieve equity. This legislation reforms policies and expands federal health care resources for racial and ethnic minorities, as well as other underserved populations who face discrimination and barriers to care due to their immigration status, sex, age, ability, sexual orientation, gender identity, and English proficiency.

Please support these measures to ensure that every one of our country's families can thrive.

U.S. Breastfeeding Committee • www.USBreastfeeding.org

