Maternal and Child Health

Based on findings from the PA Maternal Mortality Review Committee (MMRC), overdoses and mental health are the top causes of pregnancy-related deaths, and the majority of deaths occur during the postpartum periods. There are also significant disparities. Between 2017 and 2021, the rate of maternal mortality per 100,000 live births in Pennsylvania remained over three times higher among Black people (40.4) than White individuals (13.3).

In response to this program, PHFC recommends the policies outlined below, which also support and build on recent positive developments across the Commonwealth. Among others, these positive developments include the establishment of the Black Maternal Health Caucus, the PA Doula Commission, the PA Community Work Collaborative; the ongoing work of community-based maternal health organizations; the PA legislature's $25.6 million in American Rescue Plan funding for maternal and child health; the Shapiro Administration's funding for the MMRC; and a collective set of policy recommendations supported by over 30 maternal health groups. The time is now to build on these efforts and make a significant, lasting impact.

Recommendations

Include funding in the State FY 2025-2026 Budget to sustain a **Perinatal Behavioral Health Access & Consultation Program** that will be stood up during the 2024-2025 State FY to provide consultation and expertise to providers on how to identify and care for women and other birthing people with mental health or substance use-related needs (following 25 other states with similar programs).

Build a **diverse, culturally appropriate perinatal health workforce** in the community by:

- Submitting a PA DHS State Plan Amendment to enable PA Medical Assistance to reimburse Certified Perinatal Doulas for providing emotional, physical, and informational support to women and other birthing people

- Submitting a PA DHS State Plan Amendment to enable PA Medical Assistance to also reimburse Certified Community Health Workers for serving communities in which they reside or communities with which they may share ethnicity, language, socioeconomic status, or life experiences to improve health outcomes in the community

- Using the PA Insurance Department's "bully pulpit" to convene and ask commercial health plans to adopt similar reimbursement policies for Doulas and CHWs, following the certification standards from the PA Certification Board for both professions

- Providing state-funded stipends, grants, or tax breaks for perinatal clinical educators, including but not limited to midwives, to serve as clinical preceptors for students in underserved areas

- Providing state-funded scholarships for Black people and other people of color to pursue education in perinatal health disciplines and careers

- Providing workforce development grants, apprenticeship opportunities, and state funding opportunities to support existing doula training programs in the community and foster team-based relationships between clinical providers and doulas

- Supporting the "Midwifery Modernization" bill that Senator Rosemary Brown will be introducing to update the scope of practice for midwives and enable Certified Midwifes to practice in PA

Increase and streamline enrollment in **WIC** by:

- Adding a WIC enrollment button to the Pennsylvania Medical Assistance's COMPASS enrollment platform

- Increasing awareness about the importance and benefits of enrolling in WIC across state departments and programs that serve the eligible population
- Continuing text messaging outreach to SNAP and Medical Assistance eligible families about WIC

- Creating a statewide outreach campaign that supplements local campaign

- Supporting WIC mobile units

- Continuing the virtual visit options for WIC