

ADDRESSING MATERNAL HEALTH AND EQUITY

Structural racism has a profound effect on maternal health, resulting in significant inequities for people of color. Black people in the United States are up to four times more likely to experience pregnancy-related death compared with white people, even when accounting for varying factors such as education and income level.¹ State policy initiatives to solve these inequities are critical to improving maternal health.

Essential hospitals treat a disproportionate number of individuals impacted by these negative outcomes—more than half of their patients are people of color.ⁱⁱ Between 1999 and 2019, essential hospitals served counties in which maternal mortality rates reached 45 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births, compared with 16 deaths per 100,000 nationally.ⁱⁱⁱ

Essential hospitals are on the front lines of work to ensure equitable care for pregnant people across the country. Likewise, many states have taken steps to improve maternal health and health care through Medicaid Section 1115 demonstration programs, provider-based training requirements, community-based services, and panels to investigate maternal deaths.

Section 1115 Waivers for Postpartum Care

Federal law requires Medicaid programs to cover pregnant people up to 60 days after delivery—after that time, many postpartum people no longer are eligible for Medicaid and thus lose coverage. Research shows more than 50 percent of maternal deaths occur after the child is born, up to 365 days postpartum, indicating that many people experience a drop in coverage during a period of high health risk. Coupled with the fact that Medicaid pays for 66 percent of births for Black people, this information indicates expanding postpartum Medicaid coverage could help to mitigate existing disparities.^{iv}

In 2021, several states approved Medicaid Section 1115 waivers to do just that:

- **Georgia's** waiver extends Medicaid for eligible people up to six months postpartum^v;
- **Illinois'** waiver provides continuity of full Medicaid benefits for pregnant people by offering extended eligibility during the full year after delivery^{vi}; and
- **Missouri's** waiver provides access to substance use disorder and mental health services for postpartum people on Medicaid who have a diagnosed substance use disorder.^{vii}

Provider Education

Some states have focused on implementing provider-based training to improve maternal health outcomes.

- **California** in 2019 passed a law that requires hospitals and birth facilities to implement evidence-based implicit bias programs for all health care providers involved in the perinatal care continuum.^{viii}
- **Maryland** in 2020 passed a law establishing an evidence-based implicit bias training program for health care professionals involved in perinatal care.^{ix}
- **Michigan** Gov. Gretchen Whitmer (D) issued an executive order requiring all health professionals to undergo implicit bias training before obtaining or renewing licenses and registrations.^x

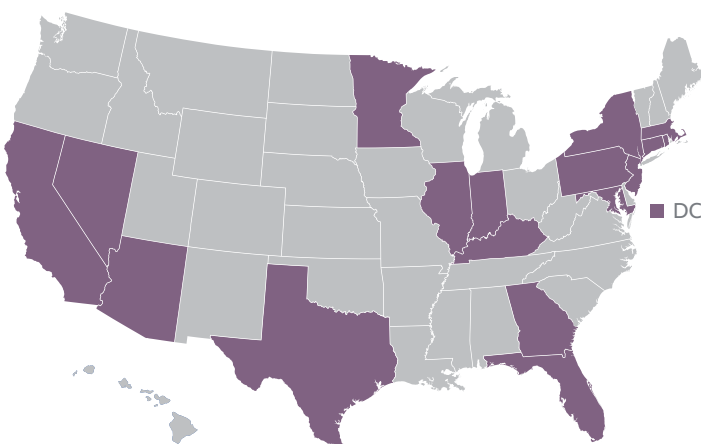
In addition, **Illinois** has pending legislation that would ensure all birthing hospitals offer continuing education for health care workforce in obstetrics and emergency medicine.^{xi}

Community-Based Doula Services

Doulas are nonclinical professionals trained to provide culturally appropriate psychosocial, emotional, and educational support during pregnancy, childbirth, and the postpartum period.^{xii} This individually tailored, patient-centered care has the potential to reduce the effects of structural racism.

Currently, Medicaid programs are not required to cover doula services; however, states can elect to cover doulas under Medicaid to improve health care outcomes. In the most recent legislative session, more than 15 states proposed bills to add coverage for doula services under Medicaid.^{xiii} In addition, **New Jersey's** 2019 maternal health strategic plan allocated \$1 million in the state budget to support doula care for Medicaid beneficiaries.^{xiv}

Further, the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services has approved two state plan amendments—in **Minnesota** in 2014 and **Oregon** in 2017—to include doula care as an extended service and a preventive service, respectively, under Medicaid.^{xv,xvi}



■ States with proposed legislation in 2021 to cover doula services through Medicaid

Maternal Mortality Review Committees

Many states have developed maternal mortality review committees (MMRCs) to investigate pregnancy-related deaths. MMRCs conduct research to understand the underlying causes of maternal mortality and recommend policies and practices to prevent further deaths.

At least 46 states and the District of Columbia have a functioning MMRC. Notably, several of these have been in practice for decades; New Jersey established the country's first MMRC in 1932.

More recently, some states have used MMRCs to target inequities in maternal health. For example:

- **Arizona** in 2019 created a maternal mortality action plan within the MMRC to address disparities in maternal health and emphasize the need to expand data analysis on racial disparities^{xvii}; and
- **Virginia's** MMRC adopted a reproductive justice framework, which links reproductive rights with social justice and human rights to help the committee better analyze and improve maternal health within the state.^{xviii}

Notes

ⁱWorking Together to Reduce Black Maternal Mortality. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. April 9, 2021. <https://www.cdc.gov/healthequity/features/maternal-mortality/index.html>. Accessed June 2021.

ⁱⁱClark D, Roberson B, Ramiah K. *Essential Data: Our Hospitals, Our Patients—Results of America’s Essential Hospitals 2019 Annual Member Characteristics Survey*. America’s Essential Hospitals. May 2021. essentialdata.info. Accessed August 2021.

ⁱⁱⁱIbid.

^{iv}Eckert E. Preserving the Momentum to Extend Postpartum Medicaid Coverage. *Women’s Health Issues*. 2020;30(6):401–404. Accessed June 2021.

^vRichter E. Letter to Lynnette R. Rhodes on April 16, 2021. <https://www.medicaid.gov/medicaid/section-1115-demonstrations/downloads/ga-postpartum-ext-ca.pdf>. Accessed June 2021.

^{vi}Costello A. Letter to Theresa Eagleson on April 12, 2021. <https://www.medicaid.gov/medicaid/section-1115-demonstrations/downloads/il-continuity-care-admin-simplification-ca.pdf>. Accessed June 2021.

^{vii}Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services. Missouri Targeted Benefits for Postpartum Women Section 1115 Demonstration Fact Sheet. 2021. <https://www.medicaid.gov/medicaid/section-1115-demonstrations/downloads/mo-targeted-benefits-fs.pdf>. Accessed June 2021.

^{viii}California Dignity in Pregnancy and Childbirth Act. California State Legislature. S. 464 (2019–2020 Regular Session).

^{ix}Maryland State Legislature. H.B. 837 (2020 Regular Session).

^xGovernor Whitmer Signs Executive Directive to Improve Equity Across Michigan’s Health Care System. The Office of Governor Gretchen Whitmer. July 9, 2020. https://www.michigan.gov/whitmer/0,9309,7-387-90499_90640-533836--,00.html. Accessed June 2021.

^{xi}Illinois State Legislature. S. 0967. 102nd General Assembly (2021 Regular Session).

^{xii}What is a doula? DONA International. 2021. <https://www.dona.org/what-is-a-doula/>. Accessed June 2021.

^{xiii}*The Doula Medicaid Project*. The National Health Law Program. 2021. <https://healthlaw.org/doulamedicaidproject/>. Accessed June 2021.

^{xiv}State of New Jersey Governor Phil Murphy. First Lady Tammy Murphy Announces Nurture NJ Campaign, Reinforces New Jersey’s Commitment to Maternal and Infant Health. January 23, 2019. <https://www.state.nj.us/governor/news/news/562019/approved/20190123a.shtml>. Accessed June 2021.

^{xv}Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services. Minnesota State Plan Amendment. 2014. <https://www.medicaid.gov/sites/default/files/State-resource-center/Medicaid-State-Plan-Amendments/Downloads/MN/MN-14-007.pdf>. Accessed June 2021.

^{xvi}Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services. Oregon State Plan Amendment. 2017. <https://www.medicaid.gov/sites/default/files/State-resource-center/Medicaid-State-Plan-Amendments/Downloads/OR/OR-17-0006.pdf>. Accessed June 2021.

^{xvii}Arizona Department of Health Services. Maternal Mortality Action Plan. June 2019. <https://azdhs.gov/documents/operations/managing-excellence/breakthrough-plans/maternal-mortality-breakthrough-plan.pdf>. Accessed June 2021.

^{xviii}Maternal Mortality Review Team. Virginia Department of Health. <https://www.vdh.virginia.gov/medical-examiner/fatality-review-surveillance-programs-reports/maternal-mortality-review-team>. Accessed June 2021.