The Bureau of Health Equity Learning Event Series

Black Maternal Health



DELAWARE HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES
Division of Public Health

Partnership for Healthy Communities
A COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT INITIATIVE

MEET THE SPEAKER

Zakariah Robinson, MPH

Zakariah Robinson holds an MPH in Epidemiology and is currently a PhD student in the Department of Health Behavior Science and Nutrition at the University of Delaware. For over five years, she has researched inequities in Black maternal and infant health, partnering with the Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) program and several community-centered Black maternal health organizations across the state. She previously served a two-year term on the board of the Los Angeles County African American Infant and Maternal Mortality Prevention Initiative Coalition. Her current work focuses on community-based Doulas and their integration into Delaware's broader maternal health care team.



Overview

01 Current State of Black Maternal Health in the U.S.

02 Maternal Health in Delaware

03 Current Effort of Our Neighbors

04 Future Directions

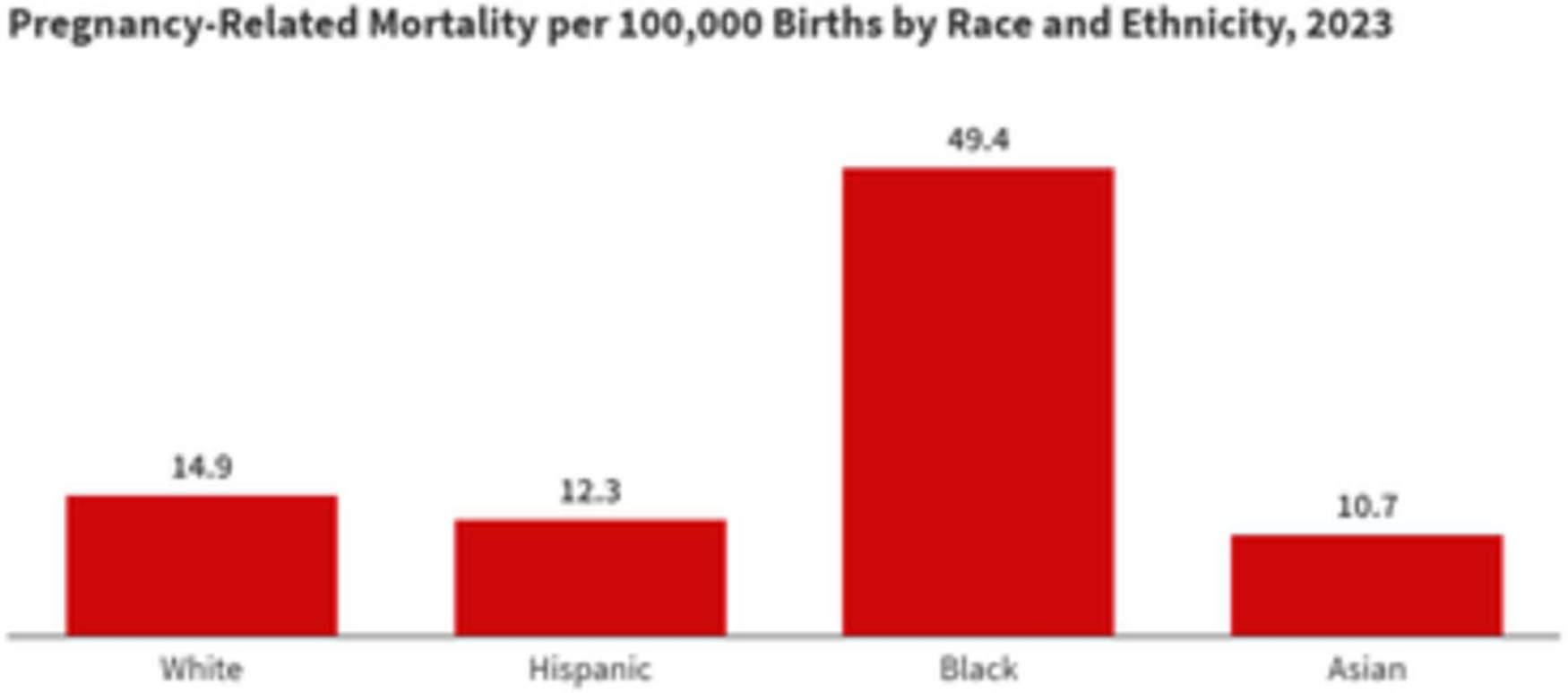


“Every Woman deserves the human right to maintain personal bodily autonomy, have children, not have children, and parent the children we have in safe and healthy environments.”

~ Loretta J. Ross

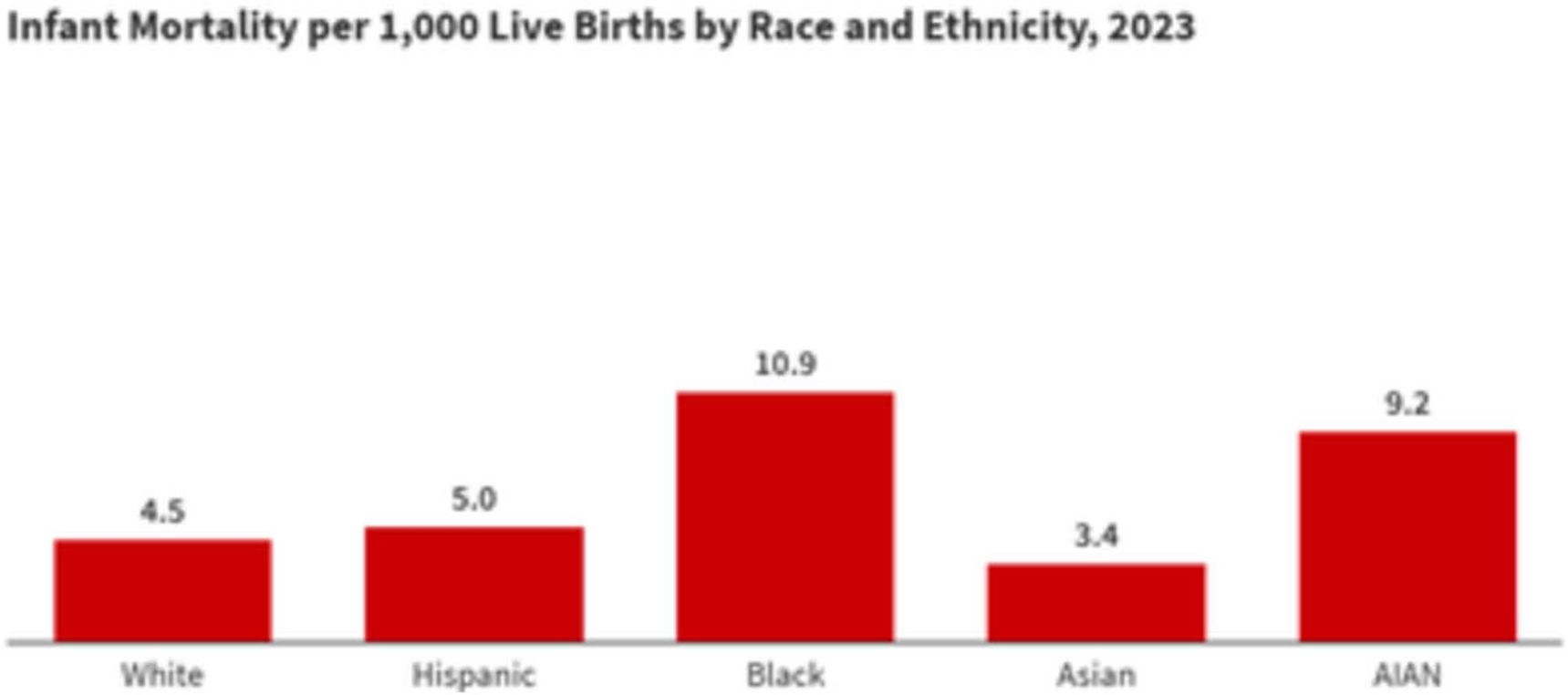


The Current State of Maternal Mortality in the U.S



KFF. (2025, December 3). Racial Disparities in Maternal and Infant Health: Current Status and Key Issues | KFF.

The Current State of Infant Mortality in the U.S



KFF. (2025, December 3). Racial Disparities in Maternal and Infant Health: Current Status and Key Issues | KFF.

Health Disparities are Driven by Social and Economic Inequities



KFF. (2025, December 3). Racial Disparities in Maternal and Infant Health: Current Status and Key Issues | KFF.



Let’s Rewind: Black Maternal Health in the Early 20th Century

Forced Sterilization

Medical Distrust

The Development of Harmful Stigmas and Stereotypes



Harmful Stigmas and Stereotypes

Black women have a high tolerance for pain.

Black women require less need for medical care.

Black women require management and oversight of their reproductive health.

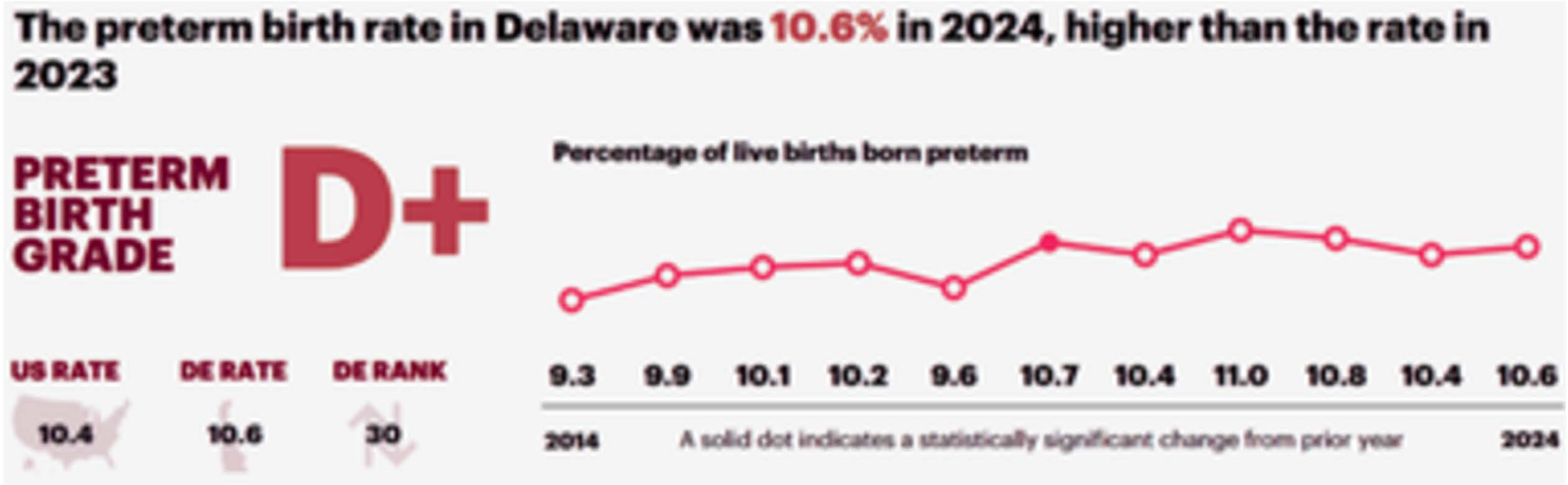
A Step in the Right Direction

BLACK MATERNAL HEALTH MOMNIBUS

Maternal and Infant Health in Delaware



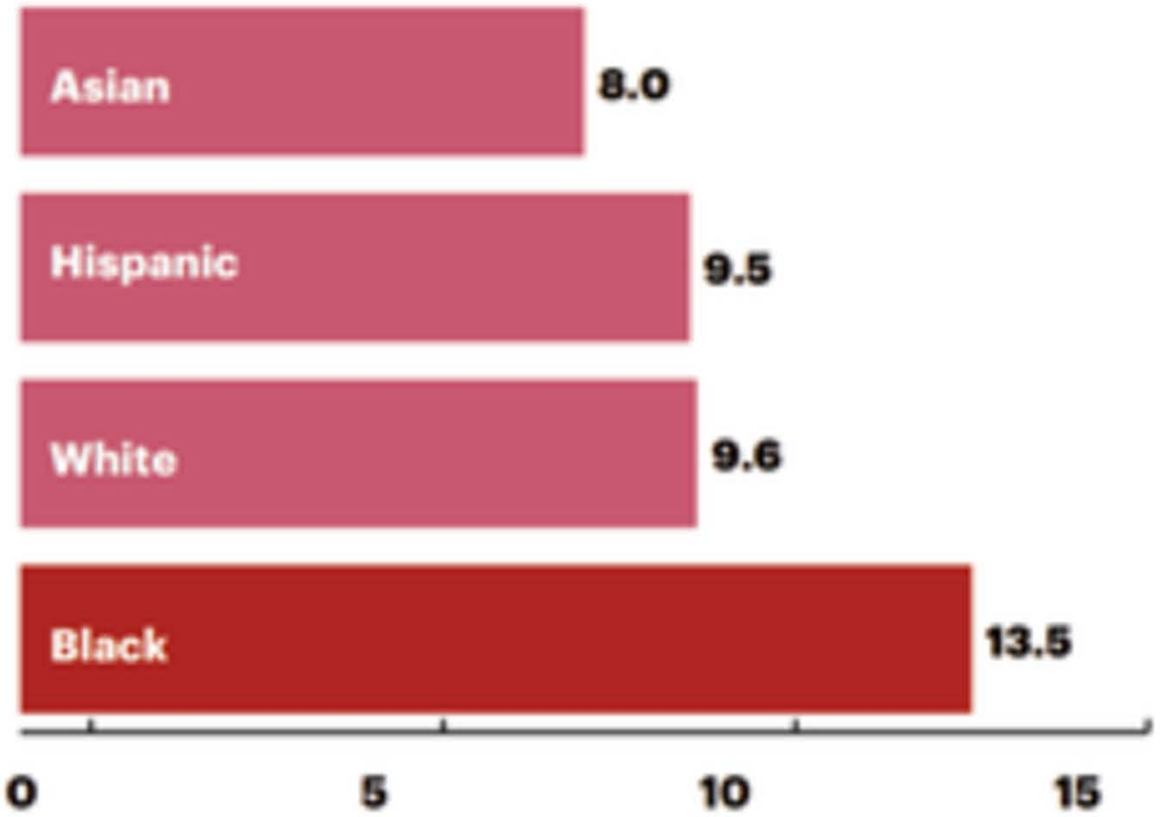
»» Delaware's Preterm Birth Grade ««



2025 March of Dimes Report Card: The State of Maternal and Infant Health for American Families.

The Racial Gap

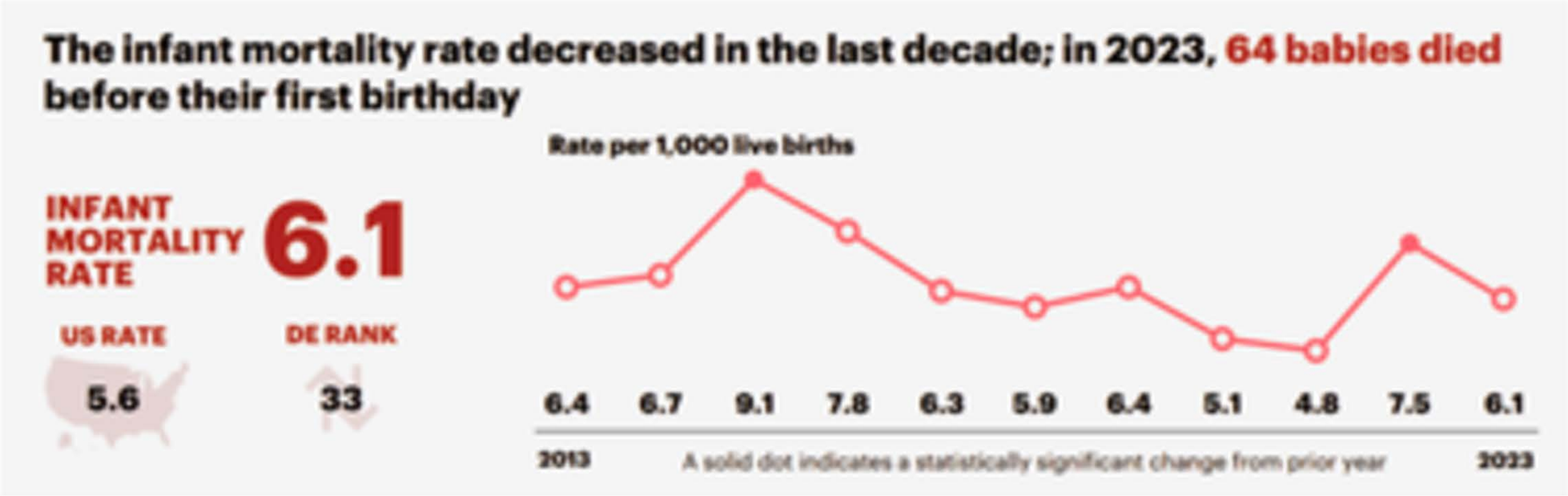
Delaware's preterm birth rate by maternal race/ethnicity, 2022-2024



2025 March of Dimes Report Card: The State of Maternal and Infant Health for American Families.



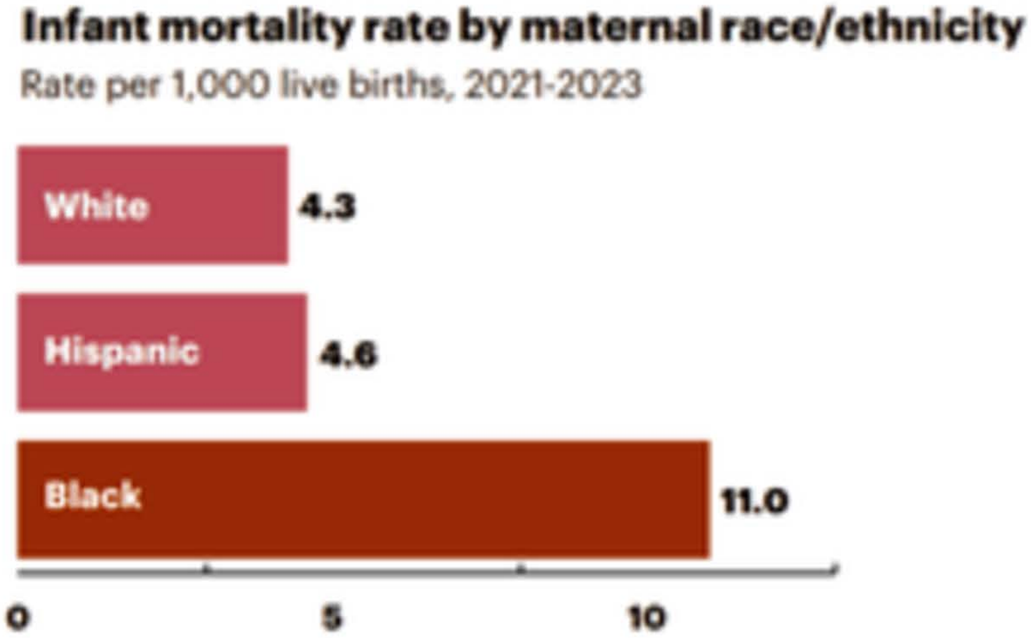
Infant Mortality in Delaware



2025 March of Dimes Report Card: The State of Maternal and Infant Health for American Families.

Infant Mortality Racial Gaps in Delaware

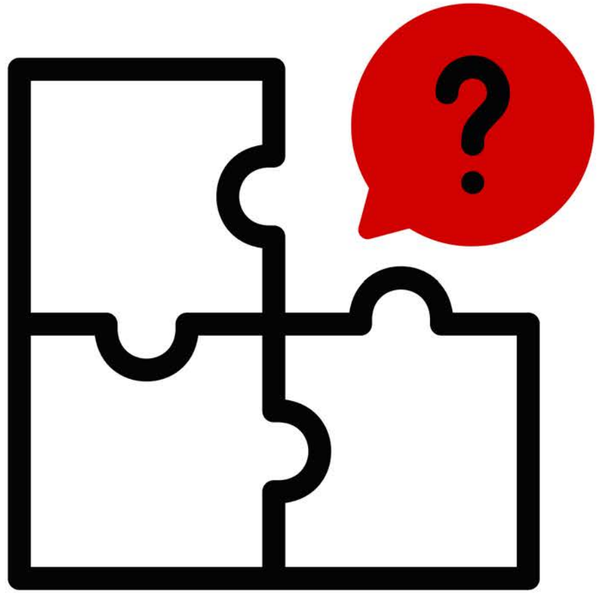
The infant mortality rate among babies born to black moms is 1.8x the state rate.



2025 March of Dimes Report Card: The State of Maternal and Infant Health for American Families.

The Missing Puzzle Piece

We have this data for infant mortality. However, we are missing the same in-depth data showcasing racial gaps for maternal mortality.



The Numbers Don't Tell the Whole Story

- According to the Delaware Maternal Mortality Review Team, there were only six maternal deaths within the state in 2025.
- However, the number dramatically undermines the reality of the maternal health care gaps within the state.



Understanding and Preventing Maternal and Child Deaths PROTECTING TOMORROWS. (n.d.).

Why Six Deaths Could Potentially Be Inaccurate?

1. Delaware's population is too small for annual breakdowns to be meaningful.
2. Delaware does not have any active surveillance to monitor for maternal morbidity, readmission after delivery, or monitor other maternal pregnancy-related adverse events.
3. The Maternal Mortality Review (MMR) only looks at fatal events with pregnancy checked on the death certificate.



It is important to keep in mind that due to the limited data available, it is extremely hard to make race-stratified reporting statistically reliable.

Challenges in Measuring Maternal Health Disparities

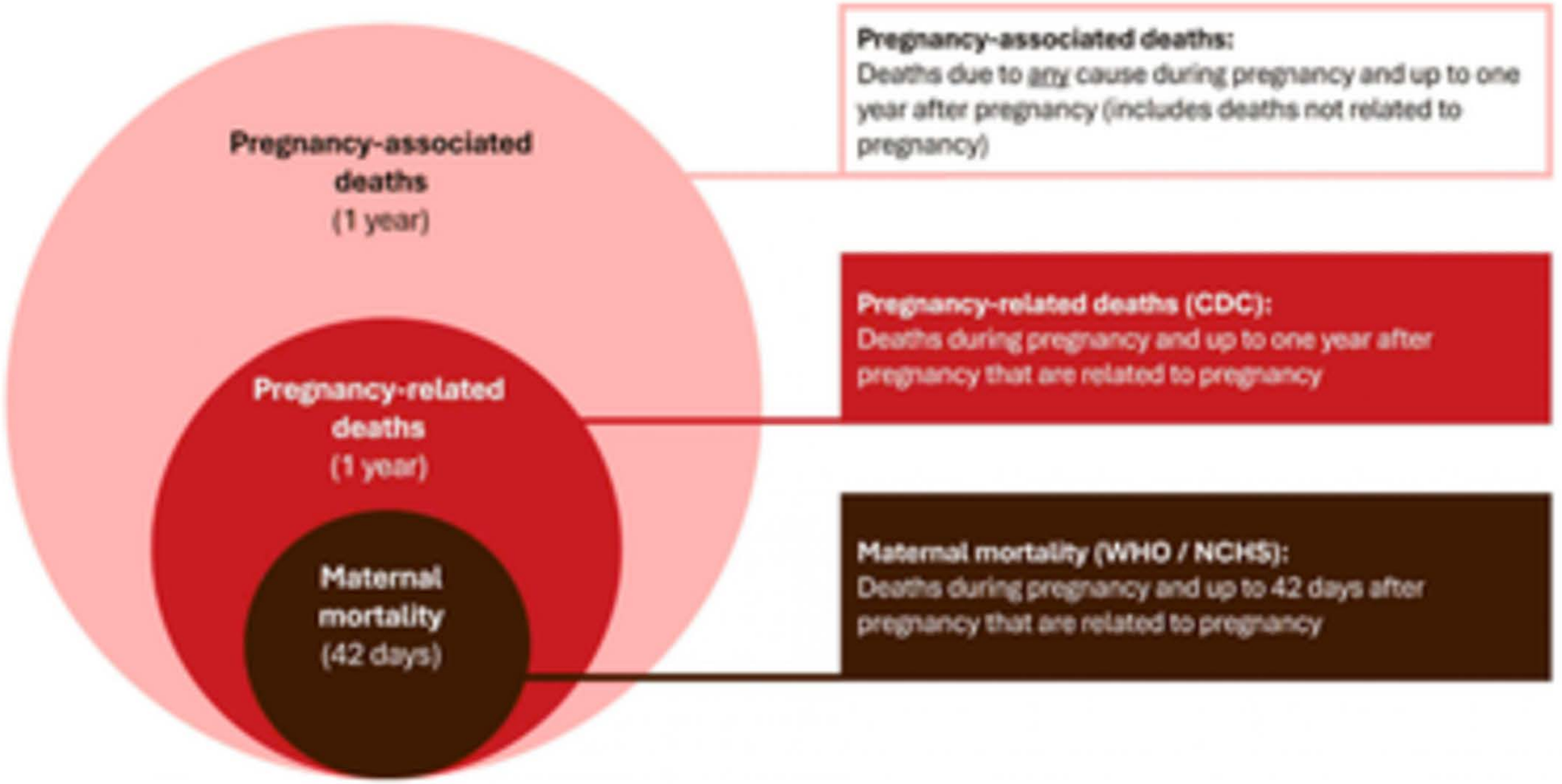
Researchers are struggling to identify a difference among racial groups due to:

- **Underreporting of maternal deaths tied to inconsistent state reporting standards**
- **Cause-of-death documentation**



Ramakrishnan & Klein, 2025

Understanding Maternal Mortality Definitions



Closing the Data Gap

Maternal morbidity and mortality in Delaware need a better surveillance systems to actually understand the severity of pregnancy-related deaths among different racial groups.



Clinical Research Shows Common Health Concerns of Pregnant Black Women Include:

- Chronic Hypertension
- Gestational Hypertension
- Preeclampsia
- Postpartum Heart Failure

Delaware's Response to the Maternal Health Crisis



Key Legislative Initiatives

- Implicit Bias Training (HB 344)
- Doula and Medicaid Expansion (HB 343 / HB 234)
- Incarcerated Women Care (HB 342 / HB 345)
- Proposed 2026: Hospital Discharge Planning (Senate Bill 301, Proposed 2026)



Division of Public Health Efforts

- Title V Maternal and Child Health Program
- State Systems Development Initiative
- Home Visiting Program



Better Health Requires Thriving Communities



(Explore: Thriving and Vital Conditions Data - the Rippel Foundation, 2025)



The Delaware State Health Improvement Plan (SHIP) Key Maternal Health Goals

Reduce adverse maternal health outcomes

Reduce adverse infant health outcomes

Improve maternal health access throughout the pregnancy lifespan

(Delaware Department of Health and Social Services, Division of Public Health State Health Improvement Plan, January 2025)

Delaware Healthy Women, Healthy Babies

STRONGER FAMILIES | HEALTHIER COMMUNITIES | A BRIGHTER DELAWARE

A statewide initiative working to improve maternal health and birth outcomes for **all Delawareans.**



HOW IT'S IMPROVING MATERNAL HEALTH IN DELAWARE

EXPANDING ACCESS TO CARE

Connects women to prenatal, postpartum, and family planning services — regardless of income, insurance status, or location.

SUPPORTING COMMUNITY-DRIVEN SOLUTIONS

Funds and partners with local organizations to address the unique needs of Delaware's families and communities.

IMPROVING CLINICAL QUALITY

Promotes evidence-based practices, reduces disparities, and ensures that every mother and baby receives high-quality, respectful care.

BUILDING A STRONGER WORKFORCE

Invests in doulas, nurses, midwives, and healthcare providers to support culturally responsive and trauma-informed care.

TRACKING PROGRESS & DRIVING CHANGE

Uses data and surveillance to identify inequities, measure improvements, and inform policies that save lives.

The Result?

- Healthier women
- Stronger, healthier babies
- Fewer preventable complications
- Healthier families and communities

Healthy Women. Healthy Babies. A stronger Delaware.

Delaware Thrives Website: Healthy Women, Healthy Babies

This graphic was created with the assistance of artificial intelligence (AI).

Local Organizations Advancing Black Maternal Health



Black Mothers in Power

CONTRIBUTING TO MATERNAL HEALTH IN DELAWARE

Healthy Mothers | Healthy Babies | Stronger Communities

Healthy Moms. Healthy Babies. Stronger Delaware.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Creates safe, supportive spaces for Black mothers and families through maternal circles, outreach events, and grassroots partnerships across Delaware.

EDUCATION AND ADVOCACY

Provides culturally relevant health education, spreads awareness about maternal health rights, and advocates for policy changes like Medicaid doula reimbursement and stronger maternal health systems in Delaware.

DOULA SUPPORT AND PERINATAL CARE

Promotes the integration of doulas into the perinatal care team, expands training and workforce development, and helps ensure Black mothers receive continuous, trauma-informed, and respectful care.



IMPROVING ACCESS TO CARE

Connects mothers to essential resources — from prenatal care and mental health support to housing, transportation, and social services — removing barriers to healthy pregnancies and births.

CENTERING BLACK VOICES

Ensures that the lived experiences and leadership of Black mothers shape programs, research, and policies that impact maternal and infant health in Delaware.

BUILDING LONG-TERM CHANGE

Invests in sustainable solutions — from supporting the maternal workforce to strengthening community-based organizations — for healthier families and generations to come.

When Black Mothers Thrive, Delaware Thrives.

Black Mother's in Power Website: blackmothersinpower.org

This graphic was created with the assistance of artificial intelligence (AI).

Do Care Doula

SUPPORT • EMPOWER • ADVOCATE

CONTRIBUTING TO MATERNAL HEALTH IN DELAWARE

Healthy Moms. Healthy Babies. Stronger Delaware.

PERSONALIZED SUPPORT THROUGHOUT THE PERCIATAL JOURNEY

Provides continuous emotional, physical, and informational support during pregnancy, birth, and the postpartum period.

IMPROVES ACCESS TO CARE

Helps connect mothers and families to prenatal care, community resources, and health services, reducing barriers like transportation, childcare, and healthcare navigation.

SUPPORTS HEALTHIER BIRTH OUTCOMES

Advocates for safe, respectful, and trauma-informed care, which can lead to fewer complications and improved maternal and infant health.



PROMOTES MENTAL AND EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING

Provides resources and support for mental health, helps identify signs of postpartum depression, and creates safe spaces for honest conversations.

BUILDS STRONGER COMMUNITIES

Engages with local partners, community organizations, and families to advance maternal and infant health equity across Delaware.

EMPOWERS FAMILIES

Equips parents with knowledge, skills, and confidence to make informed decisions and advocate for their health and their babies' futures.

When Black and Indigenous Birthworkers Thrive, Maternal Health in Delaware Thrives.

Do Care Doula Foundation Inc. Website: www.dedoulas.com

This graphic was created with the assistance of artificial intelligence (AI).

Black and Indigenous BIRTHWORKERS OF DELAWARE

CONTRIBUTING TO MATERNAL HEALTH IN DELAWARE

Healthy Moms. Healthy Babies. Stronger Communities.

PROVIDE CULTURALLY RELEVANT, TRAUMA-INFORMED CARE

Offer compassionate, respectful, and culturally grounded support that honors Black, Indigenous, and other people of color's identities, traditions, and lived experiences.

BRIDGE GAPS IN THE HEALTHCARE SYSTEM

Help navigate prenatal care, insurance, housing, transportation, and social services — removing barriers and ensuring families receive the resources they need.

SUPPORT PHYSICAL AND EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING

Provide continuous labor support, education, and postpartum care, reducing stress, preventing complications, and promoting mental health and healing.



Trusted Support Throughout the Journey

EDUCATE AND EMPOWER FAMILIES

Share knowledge about pregnancy, birth, postpartum care, and reproductive health, while promoting informed decision-making and self-advocacy.

ADVOCATE FOR EQUITY AND JUSTICE

Center the voices of Black, Indigenous, and marginalized communities in policy, programs, and systems change to address racial and gender-based disparities in maternal health.

BUILD STRONGER COMMUNITIES

Create networks of support, including doulas, midwives, and community health workers, to ensure families thrive before, during, and after birth.

When Black and Indigenous Birthworkers Thrive, Maternal Health in Delaware Thrives.

Black and Indigenous Birthworkers of Delaware Website: traditionaldoula.wordpress.com

This graphic was created with the assistance of artificial intelligence (AI).

The efforts our neighbors have made to close the racial disparity in maternal health...



Two Different Programs Happening Nearby, Making A Difference

Birth Justice Philly

Philadelphia created Birth Justice Philly, introducing the first-ever active severe maternal morbidity surveillance program.

Maryland Maternal Health Innovation Program

In 2020, Maryland created the Maryland Maternal Health Innovation Program, a hospital-based severe morbidity surveillance and review program.

BIRTH JUSTICE PHILLY

HEALTH • EQUITY • POWER

Leading the Way in Maternal Health Data for a Healthier, More Equitable Philadelphia

Birth Justice Philly is advancing maternal health equity through community power, policy change, and innovative data systems — including the first active Severe Maternal Morbidity (SMM) surveillance program in Pennsylvania.

WHO WE ARE

Birth Justice Philly is a Black-led, community-driven organization working to end racial disparities in maternal health. We center the voices of birthing people, families, and communities to create a more just and equitable healthcare system.

OUR FOCUS AREAS

Maternal Health Equity
Better outcomes for all birthing people.

Community Power
Led by the people, for the people.

Policy And Systems Change
Tackling root causes, not just symptoms.

Education And Advocacy
Awareness. Resources. Action.

THE FIRST ACTIVE SMM SURVEILLANCE PROGRAM

Birth Justice Philly is proud to support and lead the first active Severe Maternal Morbidity (SMM) surveillance program in Pennsylvania — a critical step toward understanding, preventing, and addressing life-threatening complications during and after pregnancy.

WHAT IS SMM?

Severe Maternal Morbidity (SMM) refers to serious, unexpected health conditions that occur during pregnancy, childbirth, or within 42 days after birth. These events can have long-term effects on a birthing person's health and well-being.

HOW THE SURVEILLANCE PROGRAM WORKS

COLLECTS DATA
from hospitals and health systems on SMM cases.

→

ANALYZES TRENDS
to identify disparities, risk factors, and opportunities for prevention.

→

INFORMS ACTION
for providers, policymakers, and community partners.

→

SAVES LIVES
by guiding better care, stronger policies, and equitable solutions.

THE IMPACT

EARLIER IDENTIFICATION OF RISKS
Helps detect patterns and prevent future complications.

MORE EQUITABLE CARE
Highlights disparities and drives solutions for communities most affected.

STRONGER POLICY AND SYSTEMS
Provides the data needed to improve hospital practices, expand resources, and support sustainable change.

HEALTHIER MOTHERS AND BABIES
Builds a safer, more supportive future for Philadelphia families.

Real Data. Stronger Communities. Healthier Futures.

BIRTH JUSTICE PHILLY
BECAUSE EVERY BIRTH MATTERS.

This graphic was created with the assistance of artificial intelligence (AI).

Maryland: Using Hospital Data to Prevent Severe Maternal Morbidity



Maryland Maternal Health Innovation Program — SMM Surveillance & Review

A Collaborative Effort

The Maryland Maternal Health Innovation Program (MMHIP) is a collaboration between Johns Hopkins University, the Maryland Department of Health, and the Maryland Patient Safety Center, funded through HRSA's State Maternal Health Innovation program.

JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY

MARYLAND DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

MARYLAND PATIENT SAFETY CENTER

FUNDED THROUGH HRSA'S STATE MATERNAL HEALTH INNOVATION PROGRAM

20 hospitals >70%
of Maryland births (2023)

Maryland's 2024 Maternal Health Act

requires hospitals and freestanding birthing centers to participate in the SMM Surveillance Program.

The Hospital-Based SMM Surveillance & Review Program

Identifies severe maternal morbidity (SMM) cases, uses trained hospital data abstractors and aa surveillance database, and brings multidisciplinary hospital-based review committees together to examine cases, assess preventability, identify contributing factors, and develop recommendations for quality improvement.

IDENTIFY
Find SMM cases at participating hospitals.

→

COLLECT DATA
Use trained hospital data abstractors and a surveillance database.

→

REVIEW CASES
Multidisciplinary hospital-based review committees examine each case.

→

FIND PREVENTABLE FACTORS
Assess preventability and identify contributing factors.

→

IMPROVE CARE
Develop recommendations for quality improvement.

TURNING HOSPITAL-LEVEL DATA AND CASE REVIEW INTO ACTIONABLE MATERNAL HEALTH IMPROVEMENTS.

Surveillance → Review → Action = Better Maternal Care

This graphic was created with the assistance of artificial intelligence (AI).

Future Directions for Bridging the Gap

Improve Surveillance and Data

- Pilot a hospital-based severe morbidity surveillance program
- Improve certifier training and vital-records reporting consistency to reduce maternal death undercounting
- Adopt multi-year data pooling to account for the small sample size

Expand the Workforce

- Increase state funding for training black doulas and midwives
- Formalize community-based douls integration into the clinical care team

Extend postpartum Medicaid coverage from 60 days to 12 months

- Many pregnancy-related adverse events occur seven days to 364 days after birth

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Thank you for joining!
Time for Q & A

Black Maternal Health



DELAWARE HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES
Division of Public Health

Partnership for Healthy Communities
A COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT INITIATIVE