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## Nonprofits, women's health organizations launch Alabama Birth Equity Initiative

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The Yellowhammer Fund and other nonprofits are launching the Alabama Birth Equity Initiative, with the goal of improving infant and maternal outcomes in Alabama. Alabama's infant mortality rate has been higher than the nation's for decades. (Jacob Wackerhausen/Getty Images)

A group of Alabama nonprofits and women's health advocates Tuesday are planning to launch a program to improve maternal and infant mortality rates.

The Alabama Birth Equity initiative is led by the Yellowhammer Fund and joined by Margins: Women Helping Black Women, Oasis Women's Health, and Alabama Birth Center. Jenice Fountain, executive director of the Yellowhammer Fund, said the initiative will help midwives in Alabama pay for their training, which usually costs \$4,000-8,000 per semester, and transportation to clinics.

"Acknowledging that the Alabama Birth Center has a lot going on outside of being a preceptor, and compensating them so that they can compensate their staff for those trainings," Fountain said.

Fountain said the initiative’s goal is to have 10 midwives or doulas in Alabama within one year, and to meet any reproductive health needs.

“What we’re going to do is make some ground on midwifery policy. One of which being that midwives don’t count as guests when you’re at the hospital,” Fountain said. “The person that might not make the cut might be the person you really needed to make sure you have adequate care.”

Alabama has long struggled with higher-than-average infant mortality rates. According to ADPH, the state’s infant mortality rate were 7.1 babies per 1,000 live births that died within the first year of life in 2024. That was down from 7.8 deaths per 1,000 births in 2023, but still significantly higher than the national infant mortality rate of 5.5 deaths per 1,000 live births

Infant mortality rates for Black Alabamians remain disproportionately high and racial disparities wide. According to the ADPH data, the infant mortality rate among white Alabamians was 5.4 deaths per 1,000 live births in 2024. For Black Alabamians, the rate was 11.8 per 1,000. In 2023, the rates were 5.7 and 13.1 deaths per 1,000 births, respectively.

Dr. Yashica Robinson, an OB-GYN and founder of Alabama Birth Center in Huntsville, said that access to prenatal care in rural counties makes a major difference in infant mortality.

“It doesn’t have to be a huge medical event,” Robinson said of giving birth. “It’s when we’re not properly prepared and properly educated, our moms aren’t healthy and they’re not getting prenatal care early enough. Then we miss the opportunities to intervene and make sure they get off to a good start.”

Part of the initiative also includes advocating for policy changes like funding for birth centers, Robinson and Fountain said. Robinson said a lack of support from the state for birth centers has also contributed to maternal and infant mortality rates.

She said that improving birth outcomes seems nonpartisan, but the path to fixing the problem is where partisan politics come in.

“It doesn’t matter what side you’re on, we want to see improved outcomes for both moms and babies,” Robinson said. “I think the problem ends up being lawmakers’ understanding of how we bring that change about.”

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