



Media Release

Rhode Island KIDS COUNT hosting a policy roundtable focused on Rhode Island maternal and infant health disparities

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Providence, RI (May 30, 2025): Rhode Island KIDS COUNT will hold a policy roundtable focused on maternal and infant health, on Monday, June 2, 2025, from 3:30 p.m. – 5:00 p.m. at the Rhode Island Foundation. The event will celebrate the introduction of two new [*Rhode Island KIDS COUNT Factbook*](#) indicators, Maternal Health and Infant Health, with a data presentation and policy discussion.

Featured speakers include Paige Parks, Executive Director of Rhode Island KIDS COUNT and Bridget McCabe, MD, Senior Medical Director at Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Rhode Island. Michaela Carroll, MPH, Health Policy Associate at Rhode Island KIDS COUNT, will share highlights from the indicators.

Reflections will be shared from the following Parents, Advocates, and Policymakers:

- Stephanie Manfredo, Mother of Three, RIPIN Family Voices Lead
- Quatia Osorio, Founder of Our Journ3i, Urban Perinatal Education Center, and Student Midwife
- Senator Tiara Mack
- Representative Jennifer Stewart

Currently, there is a maternal health crisis nationally and in Rhode Island with persistent and longstanding racial and ethnic disparities that disproportionately impact health outcomes for Black, Indigenous, and Women of Color. Maternal health before, during, and after pregnancy impacts health outcomes for mothers and children. Stressors including income inequality, access to safe and affordable housing, toxic environmental exposures, and access to reproductive and health care, along with the persistent burden of racism and discrimination, contribute to racial and ethnic disparities in maternal and infant health.

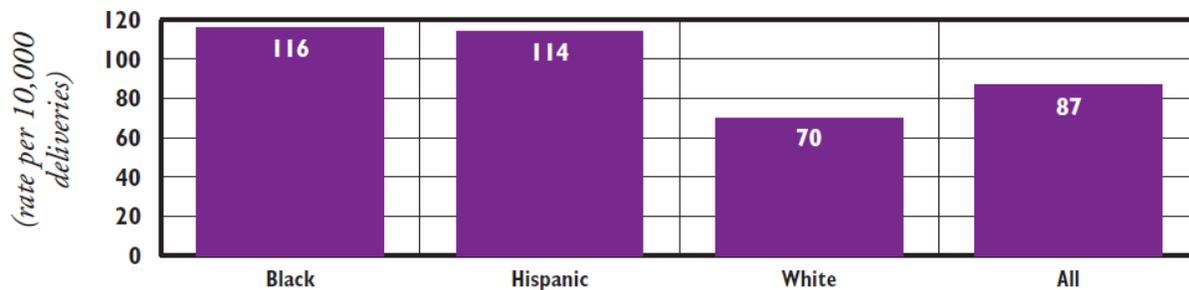
Maternal Health (pages 62-65 of the [Rhode Island KIDS COUNT Factbook](#)):

Maternal health before pregnancy (preconception), during pregnancy, and after birth (postpartum) impacts health outcomes for mothers and children.

- Access to primary care for women of reproductive age is a vital component of successful pregnancy care.
 - In Rhode Island between 2019 and 2023, 16.0% of women who gave birth did not begin care until the second or third trimester, if at all.
- Perinatal mood and anxiety disorders are the most common complication of pregnancy and the first year postpartum.
- Untreated perinatal mood and anxiety disorders are estimated to cost Rhode Island \$9.7 million annually.
- Across the United States, homicide is one of the leading causes of pregnancy-associated death. Forty percent of pregnancy-associated homicides are related to intimate partner violence. In Rhode Island, about three quarters of women who had a well visit in the 12 months before pregnancy reported that their provider talked to them about intimate partner violence.
- Food and economic security in pregnancy are vital for maternal health. Women living in poverty are at higher risk for poor pregnancy outcomes, and pregnancy exacerbates income disparities that have far-reaching consequences for children and families.
 - In Rhode Island in 2023, nearly one in five women (19.7%) reported food or housing insecurity in the 12 months before birth.



Severe Maternal Morbidity Rate per 10,000 deliveries by Race/Ethnicity, Rhode Island, 2019-2023



Nationally, Black women are almost three times more likely than white women to die of pregnancy-related complications. Here in Rhode Island, maternal mortality numbers are too small to report, but we see similar disparities in severe maternal morbidity, unintended outcomes of labor and delivery that result in significant consequences to a woman's health.

Infant health (pages 66-69 of the [Rhode Island KIDS COUNT Factbook](#)):

Infant health is the rate of preterm births, low birthweight infants, and infant mortality.

- Children born preterm or with low birthweight may experience physical disabilities, learning difficulties, and mental or behavioral issues later in life.
- Preterm birth and low birthweight contribute to infant mortality. Children born at very low birthweight are almost 100 times more likely to die before age one than children born at normal birthweight. Infant mortality rates are associated with maternal health, race, and ethnicity; quality of and access to medical care; socioeconomic conditions; and public health practices.

Preterm Birth, Low Birthweight, and Infant Mortality Rates in Rhode Island and the United States, 2023			
	Preterm Births	Low Birthweight	Infant Mortality Rate (Rate Per 1,000 Live Births)
RI	11%	7.7%	4.8
US	12%	8.6%	5.6
National Rank*	<i>7th</i>	<i>15th</i>	<i>14th</i>
New England Rank**	<i>4th</i>	<i>4th</i>	<i>4th</i>

- Social determinants (factors that influence health, such as economic well-being, education access, health care, community/environment, social context) are important to consider in preterm birth and low birth weight disparities. Stressors including income inequality, access to safe and affordable housing, toxic environmental exposures, and access to reproductive and health care, along with racism, discrimination, and associated social stressors are additional risk factors that disproportionately impact Black women and Women of Color.

“The health of Black and Brown mothers and babies are at risk in Rhode Island,” said **Paige Parks**, Executive Director of Rhode Island KIDS COUNT. “The story that this data tells is heavy and painful and should mobilize each and every person to call on our policymakers to act now by passing legislation that will improve maternal health and outcomes for babies.”

“We’re pleased to support the addition of these valuable maternal and infant health indicators to the annual Rhode Island KIDS COUNT Factbook,” said **Bridget McCabe, MD**, senior medical director for Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Rhode Island. “Healthy moms and babies are the heart of a healthy community and the information these indicators provide can help us better understand the challenges that families from all different communities face -- from prenatal care to giving every child the best possible start in life.”

“Maternal and child health advocates in our communities have been working to address the root causes of these unacceptable disparities in health outcomes for a long time,” said

Michaela Carroll, MPH, Policy Associate at Rhode Island KIDS COUNT. “The voices of those with lived experiences tell more than numbers and data can show. We must listen to, advocate for, and uplift these efforts because they know what is needed to reduce these disparities and move Rhode Island in the right direction.”

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The mission of Rhode Island KIDS COUNT is to improve the health, safety, education, economic well-being, and development of Rhode Island’s children with a commitment to equity and the elimination of unacceptable disparities by race, ethnicity, disability, zip code, immigration status, neighborhood, and income. Please visit www.rikidscount.org for more.