



Maternal Health Policy Brief

Wilson Center Maternal Health Initiative

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COVID-19 has disrupted sexual, reproductive, maternal, newborn, and adolescent health services worldwide. The pandemic could reverse decades of progress toward eliminating preventable maternal deaths.

The United States has the highest maternal mortality rate of any high-income country and experiences large racial disparities in maternal health outcomes. Black women are 2.5 - 4 times more likely than white women to die from pregnancy related conditions. These disparities can be traced to the systemic racism Black people face in the United States and persist even after factors like education, income, and insurance status are taken into account.

Additionally, pregnant people are at an increased risk for developing severe cases of and dying from COVID-19, and COVID-19 rates among pregnant people of color are 2 to 4 times higher than expected based on their share of the population.

Through the **American Rescue Plan** and the **2021 Black Maternal Health Mombibus Act**, the Biden Administration and members of Congress have demonstrated their dedication to the reduction of maternal mortality in the United States and to improving Black maternal health outcomes.

Pregnancy and Vaccine Distribution

- Only 15 states included pregnant people in their phase one distribution plans.
- The 36 states that did not include pregnant people in their distribution plans represent 71% of the population.

Highlights from Recent MHI Events

"The pandemic has shown us in the starkest terms how wide the gaps are in health outcomes between Black and white America and between men and women."

—*Representative Alma Adams (NC-12)*

"Black women in the United States, despite income or education, are still more likely to die in childbirth than their white counterparts. So that's really where you see the overarching inequities and those beliefs around hierarchy come together in one space and cause people to die."

—*Dr. Joia Crear-Perry*

*Founder and President,
National Birth Equity Collaborative*

"Reports indicate that pregnant women, particularly Black and Latina women, may be at increased risk for hospitalization and ICU admission compared to their non-pregnant counterparts. Moreover, many pregnant women suffer from co-morbidities, such as obesity, diabetes, and hypertension, which are known to increase the risk for severe COVID disease."

—*Dr. Ruth Karron*

*Director, Johns Hopkins Center for Immunization Research
and Johns Hopkins Vaccine Initiative*



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The Black Maternal Health Momnibus Act of 2021

In February, Representative Lauren Underwood (IL-14), Representative Alma Adams (NC-12), and Senator Cory Booker (D-NJ) introduced the Black Maternal Health Momnibus Act of 2021, a package of 12 evidence-based bills aimed at addressing the Black maternal health crisis in the United States. The Momnibus was first introduced in March 2020 but was never brought to a floor vote. Nevertheless, lawmakers and advocates are hopeful about their ability to pass the re-introduced version of the Momnibus, due to changes in the make-up of Congress following the 2020 elections.

Much of the 2021 Momnibus remains the same as the original package. The bill contains provisions to address the social determinants of health (non-medical factors that influence health outcomes),

provide implicit bias training to medical professionals, increase diversity within the perinatal workforce, and establish “Respectful Maternity Care Compliance Programs” to hold providers accountable.

The 2021 Momnibus also contains several new features aimed at addressing the issues brought to bear by COVID-19, including the Maternal Health Pandemic Response Act and the Maternal Vaccination Act. **As of March 19, 2021, the Momnibus Act has 107 co-sponsors in the House of Representatives, 20 co-sponsors in the Senate, and has been endorsed by more than 190 organizations.** Proponents of the bill hope to bring it to a floor vote later this year.

Highlights from the Momnibus Bill Package



The Social Determinants for Moms Act

Sponsored by Representative Lucy McBath (GA-6)

- Expands eligibility for federal food and housing assistance programs, such as Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)
- Provides funds to address social determinants such as transportation and child care access



The Kira Johnson Act

Sponsored by Representative Alma Adams (NC-12)

- Invests in community-based organizations promoting Black maternal health equity
- Provides funding for implicit bias training in maternity care settings
- Establishes “Respectful Maternity Care Compliance Programs” to provide accountability



The Perinatal Workforce Act

Sponsored by Representative Gwen Moore (WI-4) and Senator Tammy Duckworth (IL)

- Provides funding to diversify the perinatal workforce, including doulas
- Outlines strategies to deliver culturally informed and respectful maternal health care



The Data to Save Moms Act

Sponsored by Representative Sharice Davids (KS-3) and Senator Tina Smith (MN)

- Standardizes maternal health data collection nationwide, including demographic data
- Invests in maternal health research at Historically Black Colleges and Universities



The Maternal Health Pandemic Response Act

Sponsored by Representative Lauren Underwood (IL-14) and Senator Elizabeth Warren (MA)

- Requires COVID-19 treatments and vaccines to be proven safe in pregnant women
- Commissions a study on maternal health and public health emergency preparedness



The Maternal Vaccination Act

Sponsored by Representative Terri A. Sewell (AL-7) and Senator Tim Kane (D-VA)

- Provides funding to increase maternal vaccination rates in underserved communities
- Focuses on building trust through partnerships with community-based organizations, maternity care providers, and other local leaders

The American Rescue Plan

The third major COVID-19 relief bill, the American Rescue Plan, was signed into law by President Biden on March 11, 2021. It contains many provisions to support pregnant people and families, including direct stimulus payments to individuals, child tax credits up to \$3,600 per child, a \$300 increase in weekly unemployment benefits through September 2021, \$880 million in additional funding for WIC, and expanded eligibility for marketplace healthcare subsidies. **Experts estimate that the bill will lift 4 million children out of poverty, improve maternal and child health, and reduce racial disparities in maternal health outcomes.**

The bill also gives states the option to extend postpartum Medicaid coverage for 12 months—a major win for maternal health champions. Previously, states were required to provide Medicaid coverage to pregnant people with incomes at or below 138% of the federal poverty line. However, this coverage only lasted through 60 days postpartum. **One-third of all maternal deaths occur one week to one year after delivery**, so this gap in coverage left many without health coverage during a critical time. Medicaid covers more than half of all pregnancies among Black women. Thus, this provision is positioned not only to improve outcomes but also to decrease racial disparities in maternal health.

Extended postpartum Medicaid will go into effect in 2022 and will be available to states for five years, after which the program will be reviewed and potentially extended.

Maternal Health & Medicaid Expansion

- Medicaid is the largest single payer of maternity care in the United States.
- Approximately 2 million people each year are covered by Medicaid for pregnancy.
- Medicaid pays for 4 in 10 births in the United States.
- Medicaid covers over half of pregnancies among Black women in the United States.
- 45% of Medicaid beneficiaries become uninsured after 60 days postpartum.
- 1/3 of maternal deaths occur one week to one year after delivery. Medicaid expansion could help reduce these preventable deaths.
- Medicaid coverage and benefits expansion would help ensure that moms receive care for serious health conditions, including **cardiovascular disease—the cause of 25% of all maternal deaths in the United States.**
- Maternal health experts recommend that Medicaid coverage and benefits expansion include postpartum mental health screening and care, home visiting, lactation consultation, and family planning services.

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