



*We Will Empower Bold Change to Elevate
Human Flourishing.SM*

For Immediate Release
August 6, 2024

Contact: Brian Reardon
breardon@chausa.org

CHA Calls for Bipartisan Congressional Support for Provider Programs to Improve Maternal and Infant Health Outcomes

According to recent [CDC Report data](#), the U.S. infant mortality rate in 2022 increased 3% over 2021, the first statistically significant increase in 20 years. Catholic Health institutions remain steadfastly committed to championing maternal and infant health. As advocates for the vulnerable, The Catholic Health Association of the United States (CHA) is working to advance proposals that will increase access to care while also ensuring sustained and equitable funding for federal programs that ensure the health of mothers and their babies.

Representing more than one out of seven patients in the U.S. and delivering approximately [500,000 babies annually](#), Catholic hospitals play a crucial role in reducing infant deaths and improving maternal health. Most recently, CHA [applauded](#) the launch of the CMS Transforming Maternal Health (TMaH) model focused on enhancing maternal health care for both Medicaid and Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) enrollees.

Other CHA advocacy efforts support:

- Making permanent the option for states to provide 12-month postpartum care coverage through Medicaid
- Increasing FY24 funding for Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), which continues to help nearly 7 million women, babies and children nationally.
- Increased funding for the Maternal Child and Health Services Block Grant, and the Maternal Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) program
- Enacting the [Preventing Maternal Deaths Act](#)
- Enacting the [PREEMIE Reauthorization Act](#)
- Enacting the [Black Maternal Health Omnibus](#) and [Care for MOMS Act](#)

CHA knows that the value of coalitions is tantamount in promoting the health of moms and babies. With this in mind, CHA partnered with the March of Dimes, to advocate for needed legislative reforms at the federal and state levels to improve outcomes and save lives, on a campaign [March for Change](#). This collaboration is a crucial component of our mission and advocacy efforts calling on policymakers for improvements in three key areas:

- *Equity*: Support standardized cultural competence training for health care providers and staff to ensure the best possible care for all women before, during and after pregnancy.
- *Access*: Increase availability of telehealth services and technology to providers and pregnant women, especially for those living in maternity care deserts.
- *Prevention*: Combine research and clinical data to inform postpartum discharge education to improve outcomes and positively impact maternal health long term.

Catholic hospitals are working to eliminate health care disparities and improve maternal outcomes, particularly through investment in innovative programs, community impact initiatives, and charitable care for the communities we serve. Our federal advocacy continues to build on the great work of our members in their areas:

[Avera Research Institute](#), in South Dakota, received a federal grant to fund more pregnancy related services and support mothers after childbirth. The \$5.4 million grant will support creating the Avera *Bridging Inequities Regionally Through Healthy Start* program, or Avera BIRTHS, to provide education, social support, and maternity care from pregnancy to 18 months postpartum. The program is focused on improving maternal and infant health outcomes in rural communities with limited access to health care services.

[Ascension St. Joseph](#) hospital in Milwaukee has a dedicated Obstetrics Emergency Department (OB ED) staffed 24/7 with doctors trained to care for expectant mothers in high-risk situations to improve their chances for a better outcome. Staffing includes certified nurse midwives to encourage healthy behaviors during pregnancy and maternal health navigators to help patients access services that can help with transportation, food and housing. Ascension is working to address the disproportionately high rates of infant and maternal mortality among minority populations by enhancing access to quality maternal health care and community engagement.

In Wisconsin, [SSM Health](#) started a maternal and infant health support program which screens for vulnerable patients to connect them with community resources and social services. The program is working to help eliminate gaps in care, reduce disparities and improve health outcomes for mothers and babies. Based on the program's success, SSM Health implemented the program in St. Louis and plans to roll it out to hospitals and clinics in Oklahoma and Illinois.

###

The Catholic Health Association of the United States is the national leadership organization of the Catholic health ministry, representing the largest nonprofit provider of health care services in the nation.

- *1 in 7 patients in the U.S. is cared for in a Catholic hospital each day.*
- *Catholic health care, which includes more than 2,200 hospitals, nursing homes, long-term care facilities, systems, sponsors, and related organizations, serves the full continuum of health care across our nation.*
- *Learn more at www.chausa.org.*