Celebrating More First Birthdays

2023 Hamilton County Maternal and Infant Health Report
When our community comes together, real change is possible.

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Making Historic Strides Together

From Our Executive Director

As Executive Director of Cradle Cincinnati, I have the honor of celebrating you. Together, we just pushed Black infant mortality into the single digits for the first time in Hamilton County.

Our overall infant mortality rate decreased from 8.7 to 5.5.* The Black infant mortality rate decreased from 13.7 to 9.0.*

This year is a heartfelt acknowledgment of the “We.” It’s a celebration of what happens when diverse groups of people support each other and apply persistent and innovative approaches to solving our shared challenge: infant mortality. It’s rejoicing in the power of letting those most impacted by the problem lead their solutions: amplifying voices, listening, and funding to test and learn what strategies are most effective.

Let’s keep going! While we revel in this progress, we see that the disparity still exists. Our preterm birth-related infant deaths are steadily decreasing, but we still have work to do on sleep-related infant deaths. Based on our current success we know we can do better.

The truth is, the smaller the numbers, the harder the work. This win means that we have to keep going even harder. Thank you for your support, hard work, and dedication to this vital effort. Let’s come back next year with even better results.

Dr. Meredith Smith
Executive Director, Cradle Cincinnati

“The truth is, the smaller the numbers, the harder the work. We’re going to continue to focus on innovation.”

* 2022 vs. 2023 infant mortality rates
The infant mortality rate in Hamilton County is now on par with the national average.*

In 2013, Hamilton County set an aspirational goal of achieving an infant mortality rate on par with the national average.

At that time, Hamilton County families were 70% more likely to experience an infant loss than the nation as a whole.

We're pleased to announce the infant mortality rate is on par with the national average – a testament to what can be achieved when a community comes together around a common goal.

We are motivated by our county’s progress. But there is much more work to be done to ensure every baby born in Hamilton County lives to see their first birthday.

**Leading Causes of Infant Death in Hamilton County 2019-2023**

- Preterm Birth-Related Deaths: 14%
- Birth Defect-Related Deaths: 23%
- Sleep-Related Deaths: 17%
- Other Deaths: 46%

Preterm Birth-Related Deaths: Complementary medical and community based interventions support the decline in Black infant death.

Sleep-Related Infant Deaths: Sleep-related infant deaths continue to be a stubborn problem. The data calls for innovative interventions.

Birth Defect-Related Deaths: Birth defect data remains consistent with national averages and shows no racial disparities.

Other Deaths: Includes homicides, infections, accidents and other causes.

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* United States Infant Mortality Average 5.5 (2023)
We center Black women by listening to them and co-creating solutions to make systems change together.
The decrease in Black infant mortality is a major contributor to the overall decrease in Hamilton County infant mortality. When we came together as a community to decrease infant mortality in 2013, the standard narrative focused on socioeconomic factors. However, our scrutiny of infant mortality data revealed social determinants of health did not explain Black infant mortality. Instead, the data pointed to racial discrimination as the key driver. We changed the direction of our work toward identification of the structural factors driving the racial disparity of infant mortality in our community. Now our work to amplify the voices of Black women in clinical settings and collaborating with our regional maternal health providers are showing meaningful signs of improvement.

While the national Black infant mortality rate has been on a slow decline, we’ve seen a much faster rate of change in Hamilton County. We are dedicated to continue that leadership so that we can sustain and grow this accelerated improvement.
Black families continue to be more likely to experience a sleep-related loss than families of other races or ethnicities.
Let’s Talk About Sleep

Creating safe spaces for truths to be shared

Sleep-related infant deaths remain a stubborn problem. Practicing safe sleep consistently can be difficult and exists at the crossroads of cultural beliefs and parental exhaustion.

Our community research team is committed to understanding and addressing this issue. The six Queens Village board members* who make up the team have been trained as experts in creating safe spaces for truths to be shared. Last summer, they hosted safe sleep listening circles where Black moms discussed challenges to safe sleep and how families can be further supported with their safe sleep goals.

Join the conversation

Cradle Cincinnati is drafting a more detailed five-year safe sleep strategic plan for Hamilton County. If you would like to be involved by providing input or helping with implementation, please complete this survey at bit.ly/hcsafesleepplan.

Our community research team found familiar themes around the hard reality of parenthood. These centered around:

Postpartum Depression
Anxiety & Stress
Lack of Support
Exhaustion
Financial Struggles

We’ve seen impressive decreases in preterm birth-related deaths but limited progress in sleep-related infant deaths.

* Lauren Brassfield, Brandi Colvin, Mia Crockett, Shamika Karikara, Keira Paddy, Dr. Fran Kazmierczak
The positive impact doulas have on the birthing experience is extensive and includes fewer negative childbirth experiences, shorter labor time and better communication between pregnant people and their healthcare providers. However, access to doulas has been financially out of reach for most families, and the birth workers who have the talent and passion are not earning enough to support themselves. Cradle Cincinnati Connections and Queens Village have been working collectively to solve both issues and have made significant strides with the following initiatives:

**Providing Access to Free Doula Care**
This program offers a year of free doula care to Black birthing people in our community, with funding provided by CareSource, HRSA and bi3 Fund. Comprehensive doula services are provided by community doula agencies including Blaq Birth Circle, Cherished Hearts and Me & She Doulas.

**Building Doula Business Capacity**
The demand for doulas is so high that there is a real need to support them in building their businesses. Our pilot program, co-developed with the NOIR Collective and funded by bi3 Fund, addresses this by equipping doulas with the tools they need to thrive. Over the past four months, we’ve been empowering them to navigate complex areas like grant and insurance applications, optimizing their business systems and conquering the intricacies of Medicaid reimbursement.

"The doula business program is essential in our community because it directly supports the sustainability of doula practices, helping both new and established doulas sustain their businesses while doing what we love most: supporting the community. It also helps remove barriers so that women can more easily access doula support."

Sesheta Tafari, Me & She Doulas

As we work toward our goal of zero infant deaths, this is how our community is thinking, acting and innovating in new ways.

Black Birth Workers Support Black Mamas
Collaboration is key to continuing to ensure system change remains a statewide priority.

In 2023, a statewide collaboration between CelebrateOne, Cradle Cincinnati, First Year Cleveland, Groundwork Ohio, the Ohio Collaborative to Prevent Infant Mortality and Capitol Partners resulted in the creation of Infant Vitality Advocacy Day, an event focused on advocating for budget and policy priorities to support better maternal and infant health outcomes.

A key part of Infant Vitality Advocacy Day was creating opportunities for lawmakers and regional health advocates to meet in person.

Thank you to the following legislators for championing moms and babies in Ohio:

- Senator Michele Reynolds
- Senator Catherine Ingram
- Senator Paula Hicks-Hudson
- Representative Andrea White
- Representative Latyna M. Humphrey

Stay tuned for our second Infant Vitality Advocacy Day, coming this September. Visit cradlecincinnati.org to stay up-to-date and to get involved.

Three years ago, Black women in Queens Village expressed that they would value increased visibility into how hospitals are addressing racial inequities in birth outcomes.

In response, Cradle Cincinnati, Queens Village, The Health Collaborative, local birthing hospitals and Black mothers came together to design and implement Mama Certified, a collaborative impact approach to addressing these concerns.

Mama Certified is a first-of-its-kind program in which birthing hospitals agreed to publicly share data and partner with Black women to improve the hospital birthing experience. Together, we are working in partnership with hospitals to maintain accountability and trust with Black birthing families while also celebrating their progress in improving the birthing experience.

“We know that Black mothers experience poorer maternal and infant health outcomes than their white counterparts, and we want to be a part of bridging that gap and changing that narrative.”

Gina Hemenway, Mercy Health

Mama Certified

Learn more at mamacertified.org

INNOVATION IN ACTION

Moms and Healthcare Leaders Unite for Maternal Health Equity

INNOVATION IN ACTION

Advocacy in Action

Mama Certified is powered by bill Fund and supported by Anthem Blue Cross and Blue Shield Foundation and CareSource.

INNOVATION IN ACTION

Mama Certified

Learn more at mamacertified.org

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**Supporting Data**

Breastfeeding Rates (upon hospital discharge)
- Hamilton County: 75.9%
- White: 77.3%
- Hispanic: 80.5%
- Black: 71.2%
- Asian: 77.4%
- Hispanic Asian: 85.4%

Multiple Births (twins, triplets, etc.)
- Hamilton County: 3.3%
- Hispanic: 3.8%
- White: 4.1%
- Black: 4.3%
- Hispanic Asian: 1.4%
- Hispanic Asian Hispanic: 3.5%

Birth Defect/Congenital Anomaly Rates
- Hamilton County: 0.9%
- Hispanic: 0.8%
- White: 0.8%
- Black: 0.8%
- Hispanic Asian: 0.5%
- Hispanic Asian Hispanic: 0.0%

Birth Defect/Congenital Anomaly Deaths
- Hamilton County: 1.4%
- Hispanic: 0.9%
- White: 0.4%
- Black: 1.6%
- Hispanic Asian: 1.6%
- Hispanic Asian Hispanic: --

Reported consistently placing infant on his or her back for sleep
- Hamilton County: 87.9%
- Hispanic: 86.9%
- White: 93%
- Black: 76.3%
- Hispanic Asian: 87.8%
- Hispanic Asian Hispanic: --

Reported always placing a baby in crib for sleep
- Hamilton County: 69.4%
- Hispanic: 94.2%
- White: 97.8%
- Black: 90.7%
- Hispanic Asian: 93.8%
- Hispanic Asian Hispanic: --

Reported receiving paid leave from employer after baby was born
- Hamilton County: 46.4%
- Hispanic: 45.3%
- White: 53.8%
- Black: 31.3%
- Hispanic Asian: --
- Hispanic Asian Hispanic: --

**Women’s Health**

Pre-Pregnancy Body Mass Index
- Hamilton County: 26.3
- Hispanic: 26.9
- White: 40.5
- Black: 22.7
- Hispanic Asian: 12

Sexually Transmitted Infection
- Hamilton County: 0.5
- Hispanic: 0.6
- White: 0.3
- Black: 1.4
- Hispanic Asian: 0.6
- Hispanic Asian Hispanic: 0.3

Obese (BMI ≥ 30)
- Hamilton County: 2.9
- Hispanic: 2.6
- White: 2.3
- Black: 3.6
- Hispanic Asian: 1.9
- Hispanic Asian Hispanic: 2.9

Underweight (BMI < 18.5)
- Hamilton County: 18.3
- Hispanic: 20.1
- White: 26.9
- Black: 40.5
- Hispanic Asian: 22.7
- Hispanic Asian Hispanic: 12

Unintended Pregnancy
- Hamilton County: 47.7%
- Hispanic: 42.3%
- White: 27.7
- Black: 69.8%
- Hispanic Asian: 37.4%
- Hispanic Asian Hispanic: --

Inadequately Spaced Pregnancy
- Hamilton County: 8.8%
- Hispanic: 8.2%
- White: 6.6%
- Black: 9.5%
- Hispanic Asian: --
- Hispanic Asian Hispanic: --

Postpartum Depression
- Hamilton County: 7.8%
- Hispanic: 8.2%
- White: 6.6%
- Black: 9.5%
- Hispanic Asian: --
- Hispanic Asian Hispanic: --
Thank you to the funders who make Cradle Cincinnati possible.

Mission

Cradle Cincinnati is a network of community members and organizations working across sectors to measurably improve Hamilton County, Ohio’s infant mortality rate and to eliminate racial inequities in the health of moms and babies. We aim to do this by transforming systems, supporting families and amplifying Black women’s voices while empowering their ideas and actions.

Vision

Every child born in Hamilton County lives to see his or her first birthday.

Philosophy

No single organization can tackle the issue of infant mortality. We need partners throughout Hamilton County to come together under a common goal — helping our babies live to their first birthday — and common objectives. We embrace a model of collective impact.
This report was developed by the Cradle Cincinnati team in partnership with Cincinnati Health Department and Hamilton County Public Health. It was produced by our partners at Deskey Branding. Photography by Knack Photo + Video

Contributors include Lauren Everett, Jessica Seeberger, Melissa Burroughs, Meredith Smith and Dominique Walker.

Learn more about our work at

cradlecincinnati.org
blackwomenforthewin.com

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