



Progress is Possible

2024 Hamilton County Maternal
and Infant Health Report

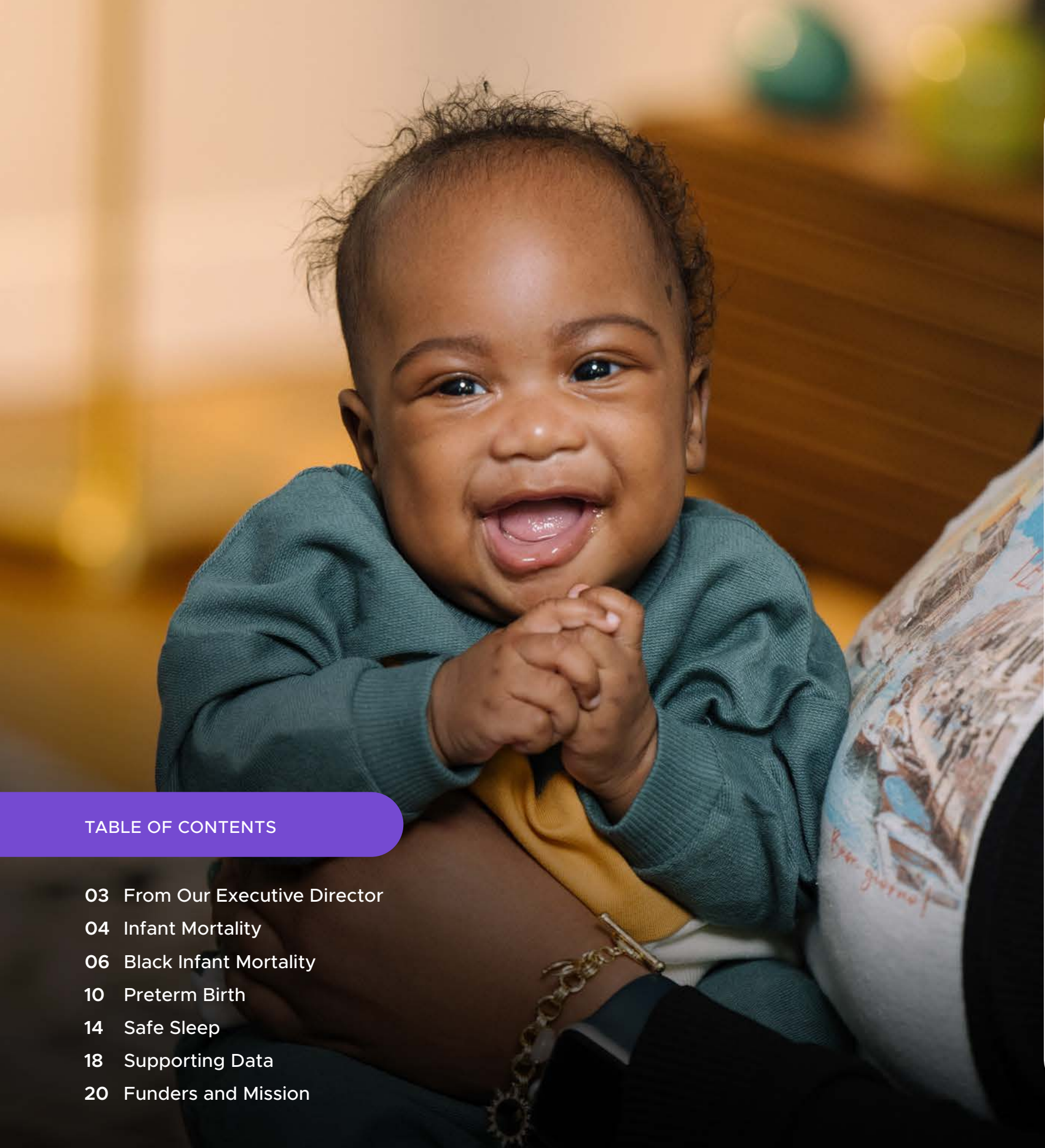


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FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Progress is possible and it's happening here

At this time last year, I was sharing good news: in 2023, Hamilton County had achieved its lowest infant mortality rate on record and our first-ever single digit Black infant mortality rate.

In 2024, Hamilton County's infant mortality rate rose slightly to 6.8 — and to be clear, any increase in infant mortality is deeply devastating to families and our community. These numbers represent real lives: babies who will never have the opportunity to live, grow, and thrive. But this year's data does not take away from the steady improvements our community has made. Progress is possible, and it's happening.

This work is hard, but I remain hopeful. I find hope in the hundreds of partners committed to change. I find hope in the hospital systems who are lifting up Black women's voices. I find hope in mothers who are leading the charge, building support, and caring for one another.

And I find hope in the 29% decrease in the number of infant deaths in Hamilton County since our work started in 2013.

Our community, with significant input from families, has built a blueprint for

how we move forward. Our strategic plan outlines the collective steps needed to ensure more families experience the joy of celebrating first birthdays:

- Meeting families' basic needs through the support of community health workers, doulas and other community-based service providers
- Reducing stress and creating space for peer-led support through prenatal and postpartum groups, parenting get-togethers and Baby Cafés.
- Partnering with hospitals to make maternity care more responsive to community needs

Whether you're a healthcare provider, community-based organization, community member, funder or policymaker, we all have a role to play in this work. I invite you to join us as we fight for every baby, every day. One way to start is by joining us at our quarterly community meetings.

Visit cradlecincinnati.org to learn more and get involved.

Dr. Meredith Smith
Executive Director, Cradle Cincinnati

The data tells a powerful story

And that story is that infant mortality has decreased in Hamilton County over time. This is due to hundreds – if not thousands – of partners and community members coming together to work towards change.

Infant mortality is a complex social problem. While we continue to make progress, we must stay focused on our goal: ensuring every baby in Hamilton County lives to see

their first birthday. This work has never been more important. The stories of our neighbors are behind these numbers. Let’s keep showing up for moms and babies — together.

Ensuring every baby in Hamilton County lives to see their first birthday.

Infant Mortality Rate
Hamilton County 2009-2024

Number of infant deaths
per 1,000 live births

2009–2013 | 9.8

2014–2018 | 8.9

2019–2023 | 7.4

2024 | 6.8

45%

Preterm Birth-Related Deaths
Babies born before the start of a mother’s third trimester are considered extremely preterm. Lack of first trimester care, stress during pregnancy, implicit bias, short spacing between pregnancies and smoking all contribute to preterm birth.

25%

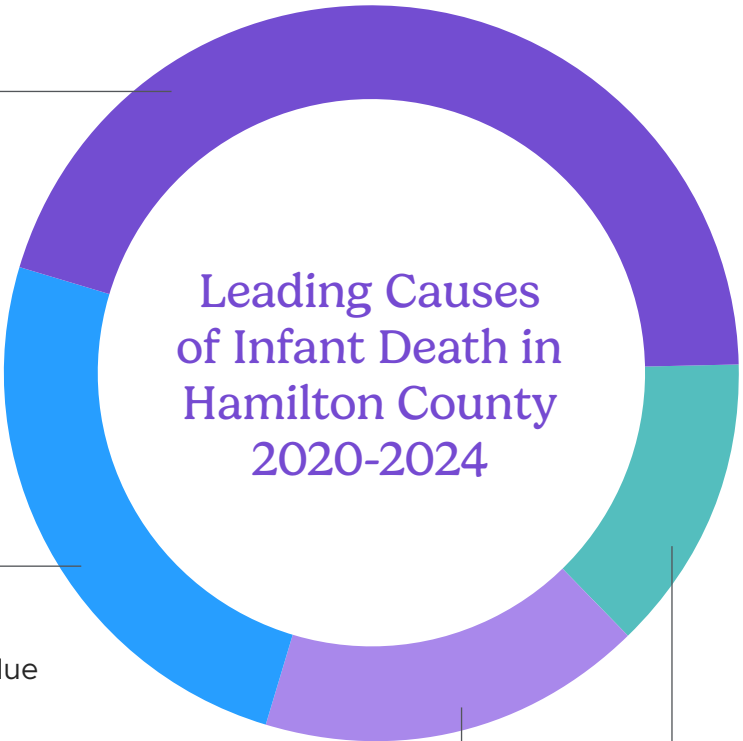
Sleep-Related Infant Deaths
A sleep-related infant death is most often due to an unsafe sleeping environment. These deaths occur when another individual rolls over on an infant while sleeping in the same bed, causing suffocation.

17%

Birth Defect-Related Deaths
Hamilton County’s rate of infant deaths caused by birth defects closely follows the national average. Heart defects are the leading cause of birth defect-related infant deaths in Hamilton County.

13%

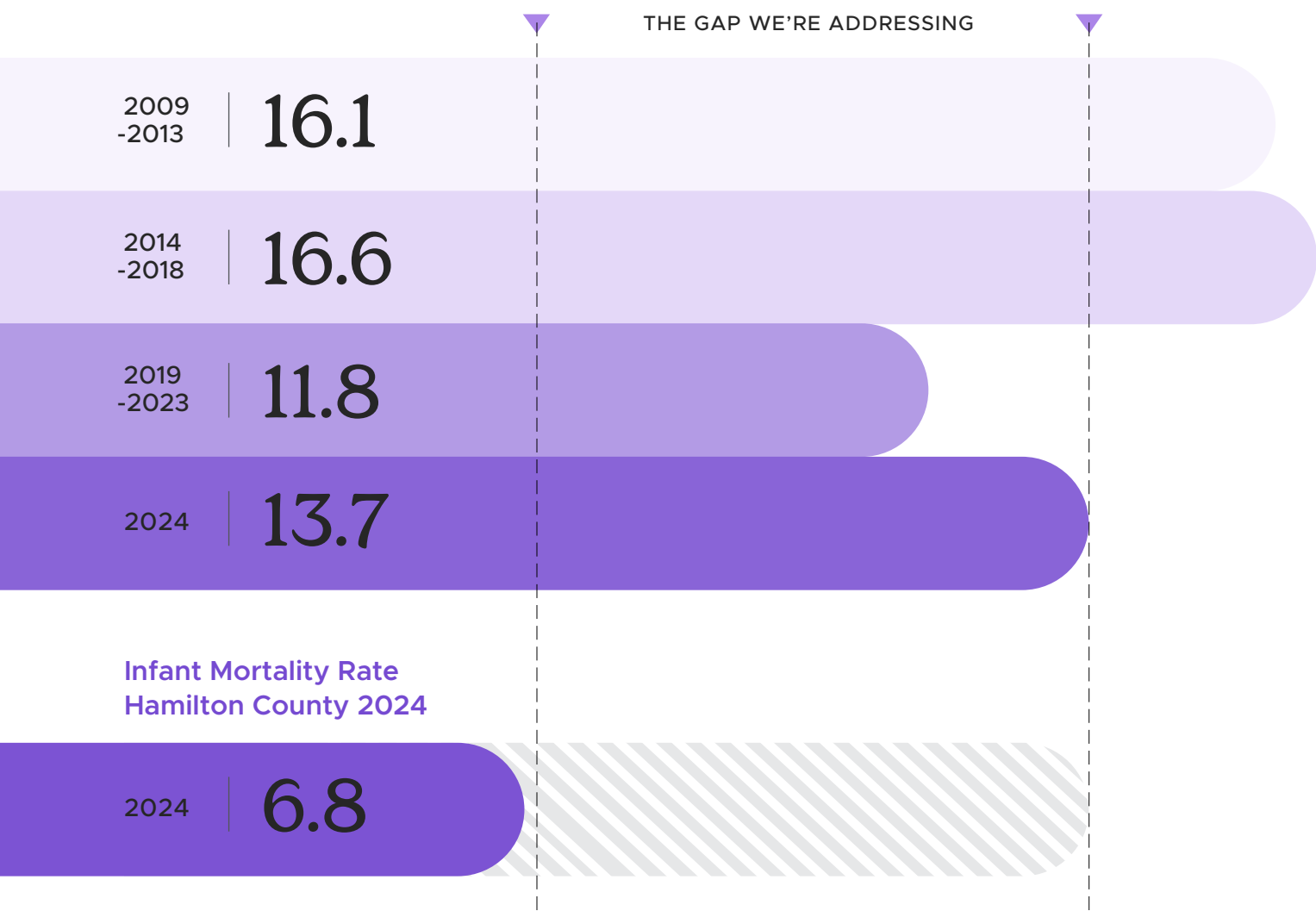
Other Deaths
This includes drowning, homicide, COVID-19, influenza and whooping cough.



Bridging the gap: reducing disparities for Black families

Not all racial groups have benefited equally from Hamilton County’s rate of progress. Reducing disparities, especially for Black families, is essential to improving outcomes as a whole. By centering Black women’s voices and leadership, we’re seeing real, sustainable change in Cincinnati.

Black Infant Mortality Rate, Hamilton County 2009-2024



Number of Infant deaths per 1,000 live births

Source: Hamilton County Fetal and Infant Mortality Review (FIMR), Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)



SPOTLIGHT

Strengthening systems of support through community leadership

“On many different levels, Mama Certified is giving voice to Black women. It’s humanizing our experiences. I may feel just a little safer in Cincinnati after maybe a little more time, having a child here.”

— QVHAB Community Representative



Bridging Hospitals and Community to Make Change

Everyone who gives birth deserves to feel safe, respected and heard during their entire perinatal experience. This is where Mama Certified comes in: a national pilot and collaborative project, Mama Certified is an equity-focused hospital certification that partners with birthing hospitals to improve care for Black mothers and babies in Greater Cincinnati.

Lifting up Black mothers’ voices and experiences are central to ensuring that Black mothers receive equitable care. One way that women can share their honest feedback after giving birth is through the Mama Certified Birthing Experience Survey.

The stories shared through this survey are already in use, guiding the work of Queens Village Hospital Advisory Boards at all four Mama Certified member health systems: The Christ Hospital Health Network, Mercy Health, TriHealth and UC Health. Composed of hospital leaders and Black women from the community, these boards work together to co-design sustainable system-level change that is rooted in community voice.

For example, several Queens Village Hospital Advisory Boards have begun adopting patient-centered birthing plans and are incorporating birthing companion programs. By listening to and working directly with women with lived experiences, hospitals are building more respectful, informed and supportive birthing care.

Learn more at mamacertified.org.

Empowering Wellness Through Community Leadership



Connecting. Healing. Building community. This is what Black women find when joining the Queens Village Wellness Journey. Led by Queens Village Champions, the Wellness Journey is a five-week experience for Black women looking to reset, recharge and reconnect in a supportive community. On the Journey, moms explore self-care, mindfulness, and wellness practices which nourish the mind, body, and spirit.

Queens Village Champions are community members who initially joined the Wellness Journeys as participants, then trained to lead Journeys themselves. This peer-led model ensures that Journeys stay relevant and meet the needs of moms, builds trust and community, and empowers Black women to lead their community’s healing.

“Thank you for giving me the opportunity to pour into the community. I personally have gained confidence.”

— Queens Village Champion

The Wellness Champions have created a space where Black women feel seen and heard — and now the women are growing the community, inviting friends and neighbors to share in this journey.

Follow [@queensvillagecincinnati](https://www.instagram.com/queensvillagecincinnati) on Instagram to learn about upcoming Wellness Journey series.

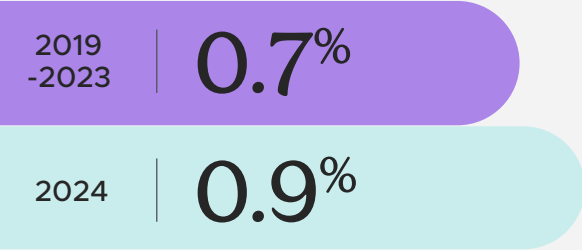
Supporting healthier moms for better birth outcomes



Extreme Preterm

Extreme preterm birth is the leading cause of infant death in Hamilton County. When a baby is born before the start of a mother’s third trimester, they face a much greater likelihood of dying before the age of one. The vast majority of our babies whose deaths were related to preterm birth were born extremely preterm.

Extreme Preterm Birth Rate
Hamilton County, 2019-2024

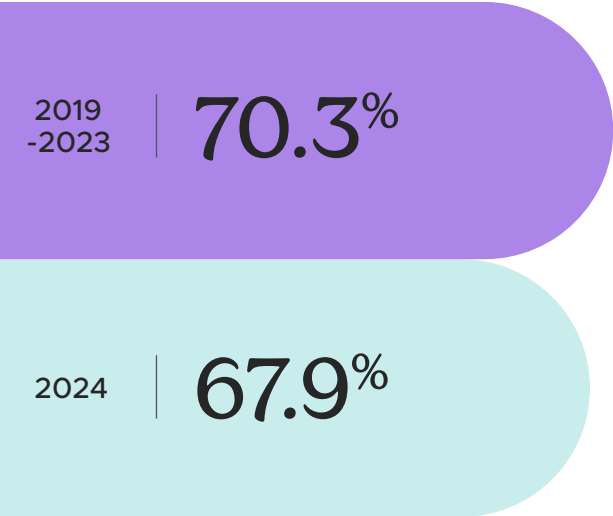


Birth Outcomes Starts with Improving the Health of Moms During Pregnancy

Prenatal Care

First Trimester Access to Prenatal Care
Hamilton County 2019-2024

First trimester entry into prenatal care can support healthier outcomes for both moms and babies. Consistent, accessible prenatal care ensures that mothers receive comprehensive health and social screenings, education and counseling, connection to resources and support, and timely medical treatment.

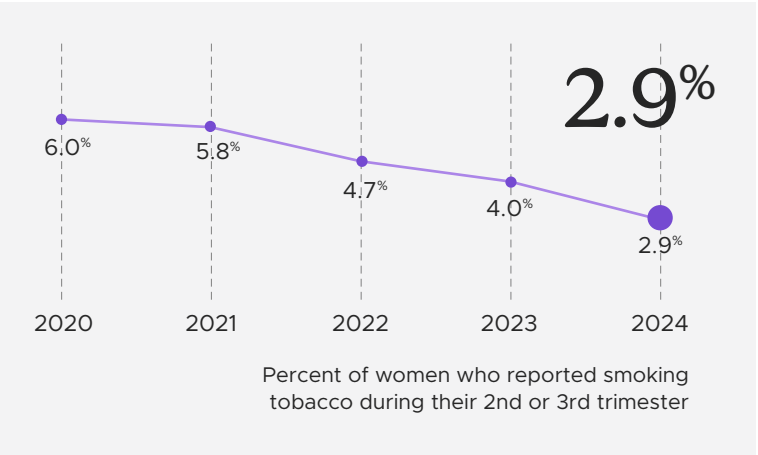


Smoking

Changes in Smoking Tobacco During Pregnancy, Hamilton County 2020-2024

Smoking tobacco during pregnancy increases the risk of preterm birth and sleep-related infant death. Quitting smoking at any time of pregnancy can help reduce these risks. The earlier, the better: quitting by 15 weeks gestation offers the most benefits to mom and baby.

Self-reported smoking during pregnancy has dropped more than 75% since 2011, demonstrating what’s possible when we support women on their journey to quit smoking.



Our community is ready to help, and here are some places to start

“Having a doula was an incredible experience. I felt safe, heard and empowered to have the birth experience I wanted and needed.”

— Local Mom

We All Have a Role to Play

Whether it’s helping moms access resources and connect with a community of support to reduce stress, or ensuring every mom can easily schedule and attend her prenatal appointments, we all have a role to play.

Community Health Workers

Teams of community health workers walk alongside women during pregnancy, assisting with doctor appointments, transportation, baby essentials and more. **Visit our Community Resource Guide at cradleincincinnati.org to get connected.**



Doulas

Doulas advocate for and provide educational, non-clinical emotional, physical, and informational support to pregnant people and their families during pregnancy, childbirth, and after. **Visit our Community Resource Guide at cradleincincinnati.org to get connected.**

Tobacco Treatment Specialist

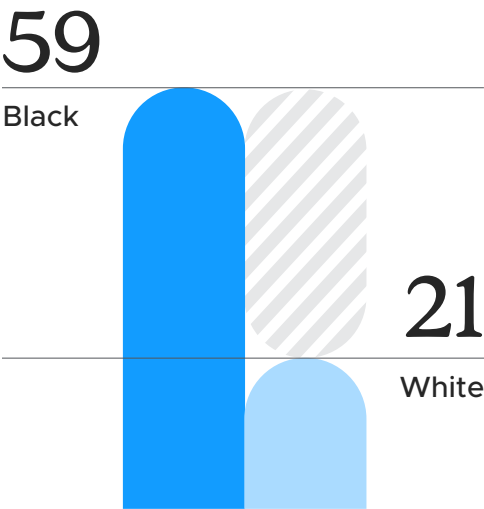
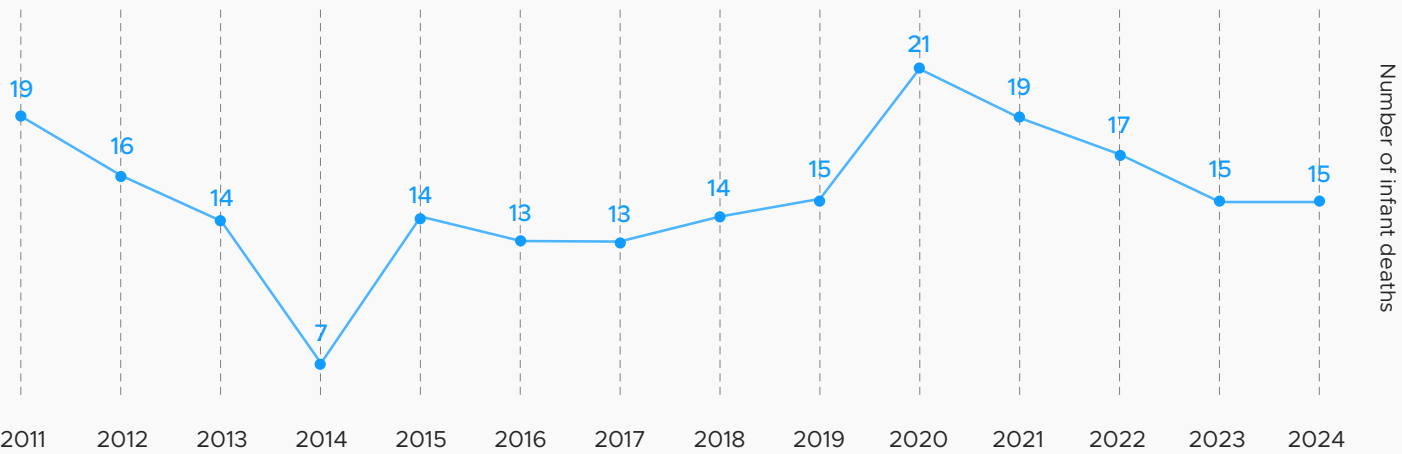
Tobacco treatment specialists provide personalized support to help women quit smoking during pregnancy and stay tobacco-free after their baby is born. **Talk with your doctor about smoking cessation resources that may be available to you.**



Let’s talk about safe sleep

Sleep-Related Infant Deaths, Hamilton County, 2011-2024

Sleep-related infant deaths are the second leading cause of infant death in Hamilton County.



Sleep-Related Infant Deaths by Race, Hamilton County 2020-2024

Black families are disproportionately impacted by sleep related-infant death.

National Rate for SUID Deaths

Families in Hamilton County are 50% more likely than families nationwide to lose a baby to sleep-related infant death.

In 2023, the National rate for SUID deaths was 0.99 per 1,000 live births, compared to 1.5 per 1,000 live births in Hamilton County in 2024.*

Babies are safest when they sleep alone, on their backs and in their own safety-approved sleep space, such as cribs or bassinets.

Unsafe sleep environments—including sharing a bed, sleeping on a couch, using blankets or pillows in a crib, or placing an infant on their stomach or side— increase the risk of sleep-related infant death.

Nursing pillows and unsafe sleep: what you need to know

In 2024, four infant deaths involved the unsafe use of nursing pillows during sleep.

For comparison, 10 deaths involving nursing pillows were reported in the previous ten years combined.

While nursing pillows can be helpful aids during feeding, they are not designed or safe for infant sleep. Babies can partially slide off or roll into dangerous positions, restricting their breathing. This is especially dangerous if an adult falls asleep while feeding the baby or if the baby is left to sleep unsupervised.

*Data note: a Sudden Unexplained Infant Death (SUID) is defined by the ICD 10 codes: R95 (SIDS), R99 (ill-defined deaths) and W75 (accidental suffocation and strangulation in bed) (AAP, 2022).

SPOTLIGHT

Leading the charge on safe sleep

Data and action provide the foundation for our county’s shared agenda of reducing infant mortality and sleep-related infant deaths. Under the leadership of Cincinnati Health Commissioner Grant Mussman and Hamilton County Health Commissioner Greg Kesterman, our local health departments are collecting and analyzing data on safe sleep trends to inform strategies, shape program priorities and support advocacy efforts. Read on to understand what our health departments are doing.



Cincinnati Health Department



Safe sleep starts with a crib. Every baby needs their own sleep space in order to sleep safely. The Cincinnati Health Department is working to make this a reality for all families in our community.

Since launching its Cribs for Kids program, Cincinnati Health Department has distributed thousands of cribs to families across Hamilton County.

Cribs for Kids is a trusted source for safe sleep information, helping families understand the whys behind safe sleep practices, navigate the most up-to-date recommendations and develop their own personalized safe sleep plans. With their leadership, more families are more prepared to practice safe sleep for their babies — every nap time and every nighttime.

If you or someone you know needs a crib, get in touch with Cribs for Kids by calling (513) 564-BABY.

Hamilton County Public Health



Hamilton County Public Health’s team of epidemiologists work to identify disparities in health and geographic areas requiring targeted intervention. Their ability to monitor emerging trends, such as the increase in deaths due to nursing pillows in 2024, is crucial to providing timely interventions.

Through programs like Fetal & Infant Mortality Review and Child Fatality Review (FIMR), their epidemiologists — along with panels of experts — identify local child and infant mortality concerns and factors that contributed to deaths. This allows the team to develop and implement recommendations that improve systems of care, services and resources for women, children and families

locally. Hamilton County Public Health is also working on a SUID (Sudden Unexpected Infant Death) and SDY (Sudden Death in the Young) Case Registry grant that seeks to understand the underlying causes and conditions related to sudden infant deaths in our community and allows for the exploration of new areas of prevention.

Later this year, our community will have access to currently available data when Hamilton County Public Health releases their maternal and child health dashboard and annual report.

Visit hamiltoncountyhealth.org to get connected and to learn more.

Supporting Data

Green = better compared to 2018-2022. Red = worse compared to 2018-2022. All numbers are percentages unless otherwise indicated. To read definitions of each indicator, download our data dictionary at [cradlecincinnati.org](https://www.cradlecincinnati.org).

INFANT HEALTH						
	Hamilton County 2019-2023	Hamilton County 2024	Hamilton County, White 2024	Hamilton County, Black 2024	Hamilton County, Hispanic 2024	Hamilton County, Asian 2024
Breastfeeding Rates (upon hospital discharge)	76.2	77.7	80.6	69.8	73.9	86.0
Multiple Births (twins, triplets, etc.) (among women who had live births)	3.6	3.7	3.2	5.1	2.0	3.5
Birth Defect/Congenital Anomaly Rates	0.8	0.7	0.6	0.6	0.6	0.7
Birth Defect/Congenital Anomaly Deaths (deaths per 1,000 live births)	1.2	1.6	0.4	1.6	1.6	--
Sleep-Related Infant Deaths (deaths per 1,000 live births)	1.7	1.5	1.0	3.2	--	--
Reported consistently placing infant on his or her back for sleep (among women who had live births)	86.9 ⁽²⁰²²⁾	--	--	--	--	--
Reported placing new baby to sleep on back (among women who had live births)	--	94.0 ⁽²⁰²³⁾	94.0 ⁽²⁰²³⁾	95.3 ⁽²⁰²³⁾	--	--
Reported always placing a baby in their crib alone for sleep (among women who had live births)	94.2 ⁽²⁰²²⁾	--	--	--	--	--
Reported new baby sleep in crib at night and during naps (among women who had live births)	--	95.2 ⁽²⁰²³⁾	96.4 ⁽²⁰²³⁾	93.9 ⁽²⁰²³⁾	96.6 ⁽²⁰²³⁾	--
WOMEN'S HEALTH						
Pre-Pregnancy Body Mass Index (among women who had live births)						
Underweight (BMI < 18.5)	2.7	2.7	--	--	--	--
Obese (BMI ≥ 30)	28.3	30.9	--	--	--	--
Sexually Transmitted Infection (among women who had live births)						
Syphilis	0.6	0.7	0.3	1.8	0.1	0
Gonorrhea	1.3	0.9	0.2	2.6	0.1	0
Chlamydia	4.5	4.5	1.2	8.6	7.5	1.1
Unintentional Pregnancy (among women who had live births)	24.0 ⁽²⁰²²⁾	26.2 ⁽²⁰²³⁾	17.5 ⁽²⁰²³⁾	40.8 ⁽²⁰²³⁾	--	--
Inadequately Spaced Pregnancy (among non-first time moms who had live births)						
<6 month Interpregnancy Interval	5.9	4.8	6.1	4.7	3.4	5.6
<12 month Interpregnancy Interval	18.1	14.1	14.4	17.3	12.0	12.2
<18 month Interpregnancy Interval	29.2	27.9	32.6	28.9	21.5	21.0
Postpartum Depression (among women who had live births)	8.2 ⁽²⁰²²⁾	7.8 ⁽²⁰²³⁾	5.5 ⁽²⁰²³⁾	11.5 ⁽²⁰²³⁾	--	--
Since your new baby was born, have you had a postpartum checkup for yourself? (within 12 weeks of giving birth)	--	91.3 ⁽²⁰²³⁾	96.6 ⁽²⁰²³⁾	85.7 ⁽²⁰²³⁾	84.2 ⁽²⁰²³⁾	--
Did you use doula support during any of the following time periods? (during pregnancy)	--	10.5 ⁽²⁰²³⁾	5.6 ⁽²⁰²³⁾	13.9 ⁽²⁰²³⁾	--	--

See Data Dictionary at [cradlecincinnati.org](https://www.cradlecincinnati.org) for confidence intervals for these proportions

PREGNANCY HEALTH						
	Hamilton County 2019-2022	Hamilton County 2024	Hamilton County, White 2024	Hamilton County, Black 2024	Hamilton County, Hispanic 2024	Hamilton County, Asian 2024
Preterm Birth Rate <37 Weeks (total preterm births)	11.0	11.5	8.9	16.4	9.7	11.6
<28 Weeks (extreme preterm births)	0.7	0.9	0.5	1.7	0.6	1.4
<23 Weeks (periviable births)	0.2	0.3	0.1	0.6	0.1	0.7
Prenatal Care (among women who had live births)						
Accessed Care in the 1st Trimester	70.3	67.9	77.0	62.8	41	68.8
Accessed Care in the 3rd Trimester	4.1	5.6	2.4	5.8	15.4	5.3
No Prenatal Care	2.7	1.8	1.4	2.2	2.6	0.4
Drug Exposure During Pregnancy (Among regional women who had live births)						
Maternal Cigarette Smoking (during 2nd or 3rd trimester)	5.0	2.9	3.8	2.4	0.2	0
Drug Exposure During Pregnancy	6.9	9.8	--	--	--	--
Opioid Exposure During Pregnancy	2.0	1.7	--	--	--	--
Previous Preterm Birth (among women with previous births)	7.7	7.6	6.1	11.4	5.5	2.8
Chronic Illness During Pregnancy (among women who had live births)						
Gestational Diabetes	11.0	9.9	9.2	8.9	10.9	20.7
Hypertension	12.4	11.4	10.7	13.4	9.6	8.1
Stillbirth rate (per 1,000 births)	6.6	7.3	--	--	--	--
COMMUNITY HEALTH						
Housing						
Renters	41.4 ⁽²⁰¹⁹⁻²⁰²³⁾	41.0 ⁽²⁰²³⁾	--	--	--	--
Vacancy Rate	9.0 ⁽²⁰¹⁹⁻²⁰²³⁾	8.2 ⁽²⁰²³⁾	--	--	--	--
Reported difficulty paying rent before pregnancy (among women who had live births)	16.2 ⁽²⁰²³⁾	16.5 ⁽²⁰²³⁾	11.6 ⁽²⁰²³⁾	24.3 ⁽²⁰²³⁾	--	--
Transportation (among all adults)						
Reported no vehicle availability in household	10.6 ⁽²⁰¹⁹⁻²⁰²³⁾	10.4 ⁽²⁰²³⁾	--	--	--	--



“No single organization can tackle the issue of infant mortality. We need partners throughout Hamilton County to come together under a common goal.”

Thank You to Our Funders

bi3 Fund	Ethicon Surgical Technologies	Paramount Advantage
The Brooks Joshua Anderson Foundation	FrontStream Workplace Philanthropy	Procter & Gamble
Buckeye Health Plan	The Greater Cincinnati Foundation	Rhinegeist Brewery
CareSource	Hamilton County	Sisters of Charity of Cincinnati
Cincinnati Children’s Hospital Medical Center	Interact for Health	St. John’s Unitarian Universalist Church
The de Cavel Family SIDS Foundation	Mercy Health Partners	TriHealth
Community Foundation of New Jersey	The Mitchell Daughters Foundation	UC Health
Crane Fund for Widows and Children	Molina Healthcare	UnitedHealthcare Incorporated
Crowley’s Inc.	Ohio Department of Children and Youth	United Way of Greater Cincinnati
The David J. Joseph Company	Ohio Department of Health	US Charitable Gift Trust
Day of Pentecost Celebration Foundation	Ohio Department of Medicaid	Lothar F. Witt

Our Mission, Vision and Philosophy

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.

Every child born in Hamilton County lives to see his or her first birthday. 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 Lianna McKenzie. 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
mamacertified.org

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