

POLICY SOLUTIONS

Infant Mortality

What is the Problem:

Infant mortality is the death of an infant before his or her first birthday. It is often described as a rate of deaths per 1,000 live births. Additionally, the infant mortality rate is often used as a barometer to measure the general health of a community.

For the three year period of 1999-2001, Berrien County was ranked the WORST county in the state of Michigan, with infants born to black women dying at a rate of 24 deaths per 1,000 live births (the State of Michigan rate was 17.7 for the same time period). Berrien's Black infant mortality rate was 4 times greater than the infant mortality rate of babies born to white women.

Needed Outcomes:

The Healthy People 2010 Goal is a maximum of 4.5 infant deaths per 1,000 live births. (Berrien County's rate for the three-year time period of 2004-2006 is 7.2.)

Current Solutions:

Since 1995, the African American infant mortality rate in Berrien County has reduced by over 30%, and the Caucasian infant mortality rate has reduced by 20%. Berrien is now below the state average for infant mortality for babies born to African American women (2004-2006: Michigan-16.6; Berrien-11.9 deaths per 1,000 live births). This decrease is due in part to education and interventions for safe sleep and other services.

There are many Berrien County Health Department programs that help reduce the infant death rate, including:

The Nurse-Family Partnership (NFP) Program, which pairs registered nurses with first-time mothers for pregnancy and two years after birth through home visits.

Family Planning. Prevent unplanned pregnancies through family planning and abstinence programs will continue to decrease infant mortality.

Women, Infants and Children (WIC) provides nutritional assessment and education, food coupons, support and counseling for eligible women and their children.

Raising-Up Healthy Babies Coalition. Infant mortality reduction coalition, which includes professionals and community members working to reduce infant mortality in Berrien County, through public education and other community programs.

Baby's Own Bed (BOB), which provides portable cribs for eligible low-income families who otherwise would have no place for their infants to sleep.

House to House (H2H) peer education, funded by the March of Dimes of Michigan, provides group home sessions teaching healthy pregnancies and safe sleep habits.

What Can Policy Makers DO?

Several infant mortality programs are funded through the Healthy Michigan Fund and Local Public Health Operation dollars. Most importantly, legislators must maintain

funding of the Nurse Family Partnership Program. Maintain funding for the family planning and WIC programs will continue to improve the infant mortality rate in Berrien County.

