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Contact: Jeff Leieritz
(803) 913-1592
Communications@scdhhs.gov

SCDHHS Receives Grant to Invest in Maternal Health Care

COLUMBIA, S.C. – The South Carolina Department of Health and Human Services (SCDHHS) today announced it has been awarded a grant from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) to invest in improving maternal health care for South Carolinians enrolled in the Healthy Connections Medicaid program. Through the grant, [CMS will award \\$17 million over a 10-year period](#) to implement the Transforming Maternal Health (TMaH) Model. The TMaH model is designed to focus exclusively on improving maternal health care for those enrolled in Medicaid.

Approximately 60% of births in South Carolina are covered by the Healthy Connections Medicaid program. Generally, pregnant women are eligible for full-benefit Medicaid coverage if they have a household income at or below 199% of the federal poverty level or have a disability. In March 2022, SCDHHS announced it was [extending Medicaid coverage from 60 days to 12 months postpartum](#) for women who qualify for Medicaid coverage because they are pregnant.

The 2024 [South Carolina Maternal Morbidity and Mortality Review Committee Legislative Report](#) highlighted several statistics that show opportunities to improve outcomes in the state. In 2020, the South Carolina pregnancy-related mortality rate was 32.3 deaths per 100,000 live births compared to a national average of 23.8 in 2020. Black women were 4.2 times more likely to die than white women in South Carolina. In that same year, 94.4% of pregnancy-related deaths were deemed preventable, compared to 81.8% in 2019 and 75% in 2018. Among pregnancy-related deaths, 51.6% occurred between seven and 365 days postpartum. Since the period in which data was covered by the report, South Carolina has extended Medicaid coverage for those who qualify for Medicaid because they are pregnant to 12 months postpartum.

In addition to administering the Healthy Connections Medicaid program, SCDHHS leads the South Carolina Birth Outcomes Initiative (BOI). The initiative was re-launched in fall 2023 and serves as South Carolina’s perinatal quality collaborative. This effort includes the South Carolina Hospital Association, Blue Cross Blue Shield of South Carolina, the South Carolina Department of Public Health, March of Dimes, the South Carolina Office of Rural Health and stakeholders who are dedicated to improving the health outcomes for all mothers and babies.

“SCDHHS is thrilled to have such wide-ranging support for this effort to ensure the healthiest possible start to life for South Carolina’s infants and their mothers,” said SCDHHS Chief of Quality Jordan Desai. “While we have made important strides in recent years to improve access to quality care for pregnant and postpartum women and their babies, including being one of the first states to extend postpartum coverage and the re-launch of the Birth Outcomes Initiative, the data shows clear opportunities for improvement. The grant funding announced today will help SCDHHS continue to pursue best-in-class

care models and make data-driven decisions to support its goal of ending pregnancy-related deaths in South Carolina.”

In concert with the re-launch of BOI, over the last two years, SCDHHS has focused on analyzing and comparing Medicaid and statewide data to identify trends and potential root causes in adverse outcomes in maternal and infant health. This research has shown that while the infant mortality rate among infants enrolled in Medicaid has been lower than the statewide average for the last three years, the rates have not always fluctuated in the same direction year-over-year. It has also revealed the leading cause of infant death for those enrolled in Medicaid, accidental suffocation or strangulation in bed, has varied from statewide data. In response to this data and in support of the agency’s mission and strategic goals, SCDHHS immediately engaged its pediatric-focused quality improvement program, Quality through Technology and Innovation in Pediatrics (QTIP), to administer a safe sleep workshop for the 30 pediatric practices in the program.

Along with state Medicaid agencies, critical collaborators to TMaH model success include managed care organizations, perinatal quality collaboratives, hospitals, birth centers, health centers and rural health clinics, maternity care providers and community-based organizations. Receiving the grant will help SCDHHS further leverage relationships through collaborations like BOI and QTIP to continue to study and implement effective interventions for pregnant and postpartum women and infants in the state.

SCDHHS’ TMaH application was accompanied by letters of support from 40 public, private and non-profit organizations across the state.

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About the South Carolina Department of Health and Human Services

The South Carolina Department of Health and Human Services provides health care benefits to nearly 1.1 million South Carolinians. Its mission is to be boldly innovative in improving the health and quality of life for South Carolinians.

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