Pennsylvania's Novel Opportunity to Address Maternal Depression in 200 Words

Family & Community Health

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As a maternal depression researcher and psychologist who treats adolescent depression, I have observed the negative intergenerational impact of maternal depression, especially if it goes untreated. Unfortunately, this is the case for many women as studies have estimated that 50-80 percent of mothers with maternal depression don't receive treatment.

The #StrongMomStrongBaby (#SMSB) coalition has been seeking solutions to ensure the estimated 21,000 mothers in Pennsylvania who experience postpartum depression each year can access the support their families need. I've been proud to join them by contributing a lens of research evidence and clinical experience to their advocacy. As a result of their educational efforts, Pennsylvania's House of Representatives passed a bill earlier this month that would make caregivers with depression or significant depression symptoms eligible to receive services through Early Intervention, a statewide program that provides assistance to families with children who have or are at high risk for developmental delays or disabilities. I've previously written about how this is one promising intergenerational solution to supporting families experiencing maternal depression because it will allow for increased monitoring of and referral for both mother's depression and child development, while also providing in-home services.

Federal guidance currently encourages state Medicaid programs to reimburse for maternal depression screening under the child's insurance, which was a huge step forward in helping to identify the 10-12 percent of mothers in the U.S. who will receive a postpartum depression diagnosis. Now, as this bill and other pieces of legislation on this issue are contemplated by state lawmakers, we need to consider innovative solutions to ensure that moms who are facing this mental health challenge are connected with the support they need for the well-being of their families.

This post is part of our "____ in 200 Words" series. In this series, we tackle issues related to children's health policy and explain and connect you to resources to help understand them further, all in 200 words. If you have any suggestions for a topic in this series, please send a note to PolicyLab's Strategy & Communications Manager Lauren Walens.