Addressing Risk Factors to Improve Infant Mortality Rates in 200 Words

Family & Community Health

Date Posted:

Sep 21, 2022

Infant mortality, or the death of a baby before their first birthday, is viewed by health care providers and policymakers as a reflection of overall community health. At 8.1 deaths per 1,000 live births, Philadelphia's infant mortality rate is about 40% higher than the national average. Moreover, Black infants in Philadelphia are more than twice as likely to die than White infants, mirroring the magnitude of the profound and longstanding racial disparity in this outcome seen across the nation.

Though the most common causes of infant mortality in the U.S. are birth defects and prematurity, Sudden Unexpected Infant Death syndrome (SUID) is the leading cause of death for infants aged 1 month to 1 year. Safe sleep practices, exclusive breastfeeding and maternal smoking cessation are proven strategies to reduce SUID.

Evidence-based home visiting programs are an essential intervention for supporting these strategies, providing in-home education and skill-building for at-risk pregnant people and young families. Yet the federal funding stream that supports these programs—the Maternal, Infant, Early Childhood Home Visiting Program (MIECHV)—is set to expire at the end of this month unless Congress acts. PolicyLab recently joined a group of 700+ organizations calling for immediate action.

PolicyLab has played a key role in evaluating the effectiveness of Pennsylvania's home visiting programs, finding benefits for prenatal smoking cessation among other outcomes. Nationally, programs funded through MIECHV have been shown to improve safe sleep behaviors. It's critical that we fund programs that we know focus on modifiable risk factors for SUID, and MIECHV is a needed investment in this space.

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 Strategic Operations & Communications Director ***Lauren Walens***.

Daria Murosko
Daria Murosko
MD, MPH, MSHP
Faculty Member