

MKE Elevate Issue Brief: MATERNAL AND CHILD HEALTH IN MILWAUKEE



Published February 1, 2023

Maternal and child health is the foundation of the health of our communities. Poor pregnancy outcomes mean that babies are at **higher risk of health complications or cognitive delays**. They may grow up and continue to have health issues as children or young adults. Complications experienced during pregnancy can also lead to longer-lasting health issues for the birthing person.

Maternal and child health is impacted by many socio-economic factors: access to and quality of education, insurance status and healthcare access, quality of healthcare providers, income, family cohesion, and more.

Key Data:	Percentage* or Rate per 1,000 live births in 2020	Populations most impacted	Percent change since 2015	Trendline
Infant mortality	8.8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Non-Hispanic American Indian/Alaska Native and Non-Hispanic Black/African Americans Pregnant people <18 and 45+ years 	+ 1.2%	↑
Preterm births	12.3%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Non-Hispanic Black/African Americans Pregnant people ages 15-17 and 40+ years 	+ 18.3%	↑
Infants born with low birthweight	11.6%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Non-Hispanic Black/African Americans Pregnant people <19 and 45+ years 	+ 17.2%	↑

*county-level data

Preterm: < 37 weeks gestation; Low birthweight: babies born weighing < 2,500 grams (5 pounds, 8 ounces)

Data source: Wisconsin Department of Health Services [Wisconsin Interactive Statistics on Health \(WISH\) Query System](#), accessed via [Health Compass Milwaukee](#)

Black/African Americans are clearly **more impacted by these adverse pregnancy outcomes**, and the trends are largely getting worse. This has a rippling effect throughout their families and communities, impacting health and wellbeing of **entire social networks**.

Disparities in Maternal and Child Outcomes

Is there a disparity?

There is certainly a racial/ethnic disparity in most sexual and reproductive health topics, but especially maternal and child health indicators like infant mortality, low birth weight, and preterm birth, as shown in the table above. While these reproductive issues can occur across any and all populations, Black/African American people are impacted much more significantly in Milwaukee. Age can also impact birth outcomes: birthing people below age 18 and above age 45 are also more likely to have adverse pregnancy outcomes. ¹ Infant mortality also occurs disproportionately in the American Indian/Alaska Native population. ¹

How do social conditions, access to resources, and risk/protective factors impact this issue?

These disparities in birth outcomes largely stem, directly or indirectly, from **racism over the course of the person's life**. ²

- Non-white people often have **lower quality education**, largely driven by structural and institutional racism.
- Socio-economic factors that are exacerbated by racism mean non-white people often have **lower healthcare access** and they may receive **poorer quality care** when they do have access.
- The daily stressors of living with racism can impact a person's overall health and the **health of a pregnancy**.

The disparities in pregnancy outcome for older birthing people are likely more complex, with biology potentially playing a stronger role in the outcomes (e.g. older age is associated with higher risk pregnancies). ³

We have the ability to improve maternal and child health in next five years

Some examples of evidence-based policy, systems, and environmental (PSE) strategies we could implement:

Many of the factors that can improve maternal and child outcomes are at the policy level, like expanding and promoting supportive programs such as WIC, improving access to health insurance, and bringing care into higher-risk communities. Minimum wage increases and various tax credits can reduce poverty which improves health outcomes. Healthcare practitioners should be trained in implicit bias and cultural competency to ensure Black/African American pregnant people receive high quality care.

Some other interventions that can reduce infant mortality include expanding education around safe sleep and providing more safe sleep resources to families, and educating pregnant people around the importance of monitoring their pregnancies through things like tracking fetal movement and emphasizing the importance of seeking medical care when something doesn't feel right.

Is someone already working on issue?

In addition to the numerous FQHCs and large healthcare systems operating in Milwaukee that provide family planning and prenatal care to people with any insurance status, there are numerous organizations focused on improving birth outcomes in the city, especially for people of color:

- Black Health Coalition of Milwaukee
- African American Breastfeeding Network
- Children's Health Alliance

The Milwaukee Film organization held a Black Birth Symposium in March 2022, using film and discussion to bring the issue of racial inequities to the forefront. They held a follow-up symposium in September, bringing together invested partners to discuss issues and solutions, and hopefully begin to develop further partnerships.

Could more be done if MKE Elevate takes on issue?

MKE Elevate could serve as a host for a coalition, bringing together the many partners who are invested in the issue to ensure efforts are coordinated and well-executed.

Is there political will to address issue?

The issue of racial inequities in infant mortality is very well-known in Milwaukee. This issue has received national attention in the past and there is a significant drive to address and improve this issue.

Sources:

Data source for Infant Mortality Rate:

<https://www.healthcompassmilwaukee.org/indicators/index/view?indicatorId=289&localeId=3140&localeChartIdxs=1%7C2%7C4>

Data source for Preterm Births:

<https://www.healthcompassmilwaukee.org/indicators/index/view?indicatorId=6051&localeId=3140&localeChartIdxs=1%7C2%7C4>

Data source for Infants Born with Low Birth Weight:

<https://www.healthcompassmilwaukee.org/indicators/index/view?indicatorId=172&localeId=3140&localeChartIdxs=1|2|4>

¹ These stats are also found in the Health Compass data, when using the age or race/ethnicity filters for each metric.

² Michael Lu et al: Closing the Black-White Gap in Birth Outcomes: A Life-course Approach
<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4443479/>

³ Louise Kenny et al: Advanced Maternal Age and Adverse Pregnancy Outcome: Evidence from a Large Contemporary Cohort
<https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0056583>



Our Health. Our Community. Our Future.

Contact us at

MKEElevate@milwaukee.gov

Learn more at:

milwaukee.gov/elevate

Follow us on Social Media:

