



Business-Based Community Engagement Can Improve Maternal Health, New Report Finds

- Maternal health is a vital barometer of a community's health system, and Houston has higher maternal mortality rates than the rest of the nation.
- The Houston region has a world-class health care system but poor maternal health outcomes that are partly caused by underlying economic and social factors.
- A lack of coordination and sustainable funding are key challenges.
- The business community can act to improve maternal health, which will both improve the region's overall health and boost workforce productivity.

May 11, 2022, Houston – Center for Houston's Future (CHF) released ***Social Determinants of Health Impacting Maternal Health and the Opportunities to Improve Outcomes***, which against the backdrop of COVID-19, provides an overview of maternal health in our region and innovative recommendations for improvement. Find the report here:

www.futurehouston.org/maternalhealth

“Houston business leaders have a strong tradition of leveraging public-private partnerships to support the community and maintain and grow a robust economy,” said Center President and CEO Brett Perlman. “A key recommendation of our report is for business, health and community service leaders to work together to create a mechanism for business community investment for sustainable funding in results-based programs that address the social factors that lead to poor maternal health outcomes.”

The 46-page report follows our 2020 report, *Houston's Economic Future: Health Care*, which focused on the economic vitality of the region's health care system and our community's health. These publications are part of CHF's work around health, health care and health equity.

The United States, our new report notes, has the highest maternal mortality rate of wealthy, developed nations despite spending a greater percentage of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) on health care. Poor maternal health outcomes cost the country an estimated \$32 billion in 2019. Houston, in turn, has higher maternal mortality rates than the rest of the nation. In addition, the Houston metro area had preterm birth rates of 11.9% in 2019 compared to the national rate of 10.2%, indicating poor maternal health outcomes.

More than 60 percent of pregnancy-related deaths in the US are preventable. Given that one in 10 babies in the US are born in Texas, our community can also significantly improve national maternal health.

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted health disparities, especially regarding the impact of societal factors, and the new report finds similar trends in maternal health. Findings in the report are based on over 30 expert interviews, an extensive literature review and a roundtable meeting of health experts from a range of disciplines. We found:

- A broad approach that addresses the cycle of poor outcomes and applies to varied situations is required to significantly improve maternal health.
- Successful programs are developed at the community level to meet unique needs and are coordinated to avoid gaps and duplication.
- Houston has a strong history of leveraging public-private partnerships to tackle hard problems.

As such, we recommend three strategies:

- **Internal policy implementation:** Houston businesses can implement family-friendly workplace policies.
- **Employee education:** In cases where it does not always make economic sense for employers to provide health insurance benefits, employers can provide education on available health services, such as Federally Qualified Health Clinics.
- **Cooperative community investment:** Businesses can improve health outcomes for their employees by investing in community health programs in areas where employees live.

While much work has been done to understand what it takes to improve maternal health outcomes, sustainability and coordination are barriers to success.

“We are issuing a call to action to our business leaders to step in and work with us and our partners to solve this problem,” said Perlman.

This report was made possible with funding from HCA Houston Healthcare, a leading provider of health care in the Houston area, with nearly a million patients treated every year. With a colleague base of 15,000, HCA Houston Healthcare’s comprehensive network includes 13 hospitals, 10 outpatient surgery centers, 11 freestanding emergency centers, and numerous diagnostic imaging facilities.

“We believe this report will help our community and business leaders understand the importance of decreasing health disparities which will lead to an improvement in maternal health outcomes,” said Troy Villarreal, HCA Healthcare Gulf Coast Division President.

About the Center for Houston’s Future: CHF brings business, government and community stakeholders together to engage in fact-based strategic planning, collaboration and action on issues of great importance to the region. It engages in economic research and strategic planning, holds community events and develops leaders. The Center is an independent affiliate of the Greater Houston Partnership. Its leadership program has graduated more than 1,300 business and civic leaders.

About HCA Houston Healthcare:

HCA Houston Healthcare is the leading provider of healthcare in the Greater Houston area, treating nearly a million patients annually. With an employee base of 15,000, HCA Houston Healthcare's comprehensive network includes: 13 hospitals, 10 outpatient surgery centers, 11 freestanding emergency centers and numerous freestanding diagnostic imaging facilities. The system operates a regional transfer center that provides support for patient transfers into and out of its facilities, as well as access to ground and air transportation within a 150-mile radius. As one of the region's largest healthcare systems, HCA Houston Healthcare recognizes the importance of giving back to the communities it serves. A strong advocate for the next generation of healthcare professionals, HCA Houston Healthcare is a major supporter of the University of Houston College of Nursing and the new University of Houston College of Medicine. For more information, visit HCAhoustonhealthcare.com.

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