# States and Federal Government Focus on Policies to Decrease Infant Mortality Rates in the United States

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*The Alliance for Patient Access (allianceforpatientaccess.org), founded in 2006, is a national network of physicians dedicated to ensuring patient access to approved therapies and appropriate clinical care. AfPA accomplishes this mission by recruiting, training and mobilizing policy-minded physicians to be effective advocates for patient access. AfPA is organized as a non-profit 501(c)(4) corporation and headed by an independent board of directors. Its physician leadership is supported by policy advocacy management and public affairs consultants. In 2012, AfPA established the Institute for Patient Access (IfPA), a related 501(c)(3) non-profit corporation. In keeping with its mission to promote a better understanding of the benefits of the physician-patient relationship in the provision of quality healthcare, IfPA sponsors policy research and educational programming.*

The NEWBORN (Nationally Enhancing the Wellbeing of Babies through Outreach and Research Now) Act (H.R. 117), sponsored by Congressman Steve Cohen (D-TN-9), was highlighted here earlier this year. (1)

The NEWBORN Act would help address the problem of infant mortality by awarding of grants to infant mortality pilot programs that seek to address one or more of the top five reasons for infant mortality: birth defects, preterm birth and low birth weight, sudden infant death syndrome, maternal pregnancy complications, and/or injuries to the infant.

This legislation is gaining traction in the House and now boasts 52 cosponsors.  We await U.S. Senate introduced a similar bill.

While advocacy efforts to reduce infant mortalities rates are on-going in the nation's capital, state health officials are amassing information that could lead to the prevention of infant mortalities in their own backyard.

One state of note: Ohio.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC data), Ohio holds a place in the top ten highest infant mor-tality rates across the country.  (See https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/pressroom/sosmap/infant_mortality_rates/infant_mortality.htm) (2)

As the CDC notes on its website:  "Infant mortality is the death of an infant before his or her first birthday. The infant mortality rate is the number of infant deaths for every 1,000 live births." (3)

In 2017, the infant mortality rate in the United States was 5.8 deaths per 1,000 live births. By comparison, Ohio's Dayton Daily News noted in 2017 - the last available year in which the CDC collected data - the state's infant mortality rate was 7.2 deaths per 1,000 live births.  To be clear, that number corresponds to the reality that 982 Ohio infants died before their first birthday in 2017.  (4)

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However difficult this statistic may be to comprehend, Ohio is showing small progress with a decline of 42 infant mortality deaths compared to 2016, which places the yearly total just under 1,000 children.

"This shows some progress from 2017, which is promising; however, we know that this number is far, far too high," said Reem Aly, vice president of Health Policy Institute of Ohio (HPIO) told the Dayton Daily News. "So while we're moving in the right direction, we certainly cannot stop, and there needs to be a much more aggressive intention and approach across our state." (3)

The federal policy would focus on targeting areas of the country with high rates of infant mortality and providing federal support through pilot programs to those high-risk areas.

In Ohio, the focus is similar.  Hundreds of area health officials met in late September to discuss "how racial bias plays a role" and to

evaluate community resources and their availability. Those gathered also considered prioritization of maternal health as a means to reduce infant deaths.

A $137 million investment in the state has targeted nine counties - those that account for "66 percent of all infant deaths last year and 90 percent of black infant deaths" (3)

Over the last eight years.

This past March, Ohio Governor Mike DeWine earmarked $90 million in state funding over two years for home visits to at-risk pregnant women, new moms, and their children up to age 3. (3)

Additionally, the governor noted in his "State of the State" address that African American babies are dying at almost three times the rate of white babies, "leaving Ohio ranked 49th worst in the nation for deaths of African American infants."

The CDC lists the five leading causes of infant death in 2017 as birth defects, preterm birth and low birth weight, maternal pregnancy complications, sudden infant death syndrome, and injuries "(e.g., suffocation)." (2)

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This list fails to capture exactly the disparities between communities and from home to home, or even state to state - namely, economic disparities. Personal and governmental resources can dictate access to health care for both mother and infant.

To date, Ohio Congressman Tim Ryan (D-OH-13) and Congresswoman Marcy Kaptur (D-OH-9) are two Ohio members who are have agreed to sponsor H.R. 117 - hoping to bring more resources to their constituents.

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