



Ohio Commission of Minority Health Funding: Panel on the Certified Pathways Community HUB Model to Reduce Infant Mortality and Address Health Disparities

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Good Morning Chairman Romanchuk, Ranking Minority Member West and esteemed members of the House Finance Subcommittee on Health and Human Services. My name is Michelle Edison and I am with the Mahoning County Pathways HUB, a division of Mahoning County Public Health. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of increased funding to the Ohio Commission on Minority Health to support existing and future certified Pathways Community HUBs to address infant mortality in Ohio.

In 2012, Mahoning was 1 of 9 counties identified as Ohio Equity Institute communities because of the significant disparity in infant mortality rates between Blacks and non-Hispanic Whites. At the time, there were programs developed and implemented to address components of health and wellness, but there was no single program that addressed potential barriers to reducing infant mortality. Furthermore, it was realized that there was no mechanism in the county to fully identify the array of issues impacting a women's pregnancy or how health and social services systems as a whole perform to improve birth outcomes. To help address this, in 2015 Mahoning County awarded the opportunity to implement the HUB model to address infant mortality through funding from the Ohio Commission on Minority Health.

A Black infant in Mahoning County was 5 times more likely to not reach its first birthday than a White infant in 2017. Based on preliminary data for 2018, it appears that the disparity gap not only persists, but is widening. Collective strategies are impactful, and it should be noted, that since the inception of the HUB, Mahoning County has experienced a 28.6% reduction in black infant mortality, a 42% overall reduction in infant mortality, and a 47.6% increase in full term births. We are pleased to be a significant part of the overall effort to improve birth outcomes and reduce infant mortality in our county.

Last year, African American women who were enrolled in the Mahoning County Pathways HUB had higher healthy birth weight rates and full-term birth rates when compared to the county.

Over the past 3 years, the Mahoning County Pathways HUB has served the community by **finding** women that are the most at risk for poor birth outcomes and infant mortality, systematically **addressing** their unique barriers and challenges using the evidence-based Pathways strategy, thereby connecting them to resources and services in the community and **assessing** overall effectiveness and success through quality improvement and a standardized system of data collection.

Our community partners recognize the HUB as the single entity that links clients to multiple services to address multiple needs. To that end, the model includes 20 standardized Pathways that represent a barriers to positive health and each has specific action steps that lead to a potential outcome. In addition, to the Pathways for pregnancy and postpartum care, other pathways include: adult learning, behavioral health, developmental screenings and developmental referrals, education, employment, family planning, health insurance, housing, immunization screening and referral, lead screening, medical home, medical referral, medication assessment, medication management, social service referral, and tobacco cessation.



Let's look at the Employment Pathway as an example. It is initiated for clients that are unemployed, underemployed, or low income. In our HUB, 80% of our clients reported household income levels of less than \$15,000 and many of those households include more than one individual. The certified CHW works with the client to complete the actions steps: documenting previous work history and experience, creating employment and training goals, and identifying barriers to goal achievement and how they will be addressed. Some common employment barriers are poor credit or the lack of valid state-issued I.D. Once the client has been hired and begins the new job, the CHW will complete a follow up. When the client has been employed for at least 30 days, the Pathway is complete.

It has, however, not been without challenges to address the conditions in which people live, learn, work, and play. These social determinants of health are drivers in poor birth outcomes. According to the 2019 Health Value Dashboard, research estimates that 50% of the modifiable factors that influence health are attributed to the social, economic and physical environment. Nearly 1 out of every 3 clients enrolled is homeless, at risk of homelessness or has unsuitable housing. Because of this, our certified CHWs have completed home visits with clients in a variety of locations including, but not limited to: shelters, cars, residential treatment centers, fast food restaurants, and even bus terminals. It is no wonder that a third of our clients also had inadequate transportation or no reliable transportation at all. It is very difficult to attend a prenatal appointment if you do not have a way to get there. This is another barrier that our certified CHWs work diligently to resolve.

Although our clients have had a significant number of challenges to face, as a nationally certified HUB, we have worked collectively with agencies, programs, and community stakeholders to create an infrastructure that improves the effectiveness of care coordination through a synergistic approach. We promote the community health worker workforce through training and development. Without support from the Commission on Minority Health, we would not have been able to help our clients connect to essential prenatal and postpartum care, education and work force development programs, gain employment, open small businesses, be reunited with their children, and address behavioral health issues. Through the HUB community partnerships, our clients have participated in wellness and nutrition programs created specifically for them.

In 2018, with funding from the Commission, we were able to enroll 69 at risk pregnant women, 77% of which were African American and improve African American pre-term birth and low weight birth rates over our county rates. I encourage you to consider the Commission's request to further invest in Pathways Community HUBs so that we can continue to connect women to healthy pregnancies and help infants reach their first birthday and beyond.

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