Dear ,

During the month of September, we join others around the country to bring awareness to Infant Mortality Awareness Month. We are writing to you to continue the work of raising awareness about this tragic problem in the United States. There are many initiatives around the country formed to address this issue; please read below to learn about some of them.

According to the World Health Organization, the U.S. ranked 43rd in the world in infant mortality in 2012. Throughout our country there are several pockets of areas where infant mortality is as high as some third world countries. Prematurity and low birthweight account for more than 60% of infant deaths. In addition to the tragic consequences to families, the costs to individuals and the system are staggering, with first year expenses for the smallest babies averaging $273,900 each.

Of all of the racial and ethnic health disparities in the U.S., one of the largest is infant mortality. According to the National Healthy Start’s Infant Mortality Awareness Campaign, infant mortality and low birth weight remain a major public health issue, with the gap between whites and minorities persisting over the 100 years that the U.S. has been collecting data, and even increasing over time.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, African American women suffer this tragic loss at
Safe Spots in this video

Support

Uzazi Village

LA Community Birth Center

Racism is a significant factor in prematurity and infant mortality in the United States. Dr. Diane Rowley of the Gilling School of Global Public Health in North Carolina, has said: "The research was at first just suggesting, but it is well established today, something about living in the U.S., something beyond poverty or health insurance coverage and healthcare access is helping to shape pregnancy outcomes. And that something is racism."

Studies, including ones conducted at Emory University, demonstrate biologically detectable effects of the stress of racism on the high rate of prematurity among African American women. Chronic stress, the team extrapolated, is the reason some 30,000 more African-American babies are born prematurely each year than any other group.

"I think that our research may be shocking to a lot of people, but I hope not dispiriting," said Elizabeth Corwin of Emory University. "We have some clue what may be causing disproportionate rates of preterm births in some segments of the population, and we know that we can try to intervene early. The question is really whether that is something that we are prepared as a country to do."

International Center for Traditional Childbearing (ICTC)

Incorporated in 1991 and founded by midwife and national leader, Shafia Monroe, DEM, CDT, MPH, ICTC is an organization with a mission of infant mortality prevention at the heart of their work. Shafia is the visionary behind the prominent Black Midwives and Healers Conference that brings midwives and other health care providers together to galvanize resources and implement strategies for reducing infant mortality and strengthening families.
Please read about ICTC's initiatives to educate and support midwives, to train and reimburse doulas, and to promote breastfeeding.

Please plan to attend the 9th International Black Midwives and Healers Conference in Portland, Oregon on October 9-11. Join ICTC, midwives, doulas and other birth workers from across the nation and around the world for evidence-based workshops. Hear distinguished presenters and engage with others in developing solutions to the critical issues, including infant mortality. Come hear Erykah Badu, 4 time Grammy Award Winner and ICTC International Spokesperson!

NACPM is a sponsor for this important conference and several NACPM leaders will be attending. We look forward to seeing you there!

Register Now

National Healthy Start Association (NHSA)

NHSA is committed to improving birth outcomes and health disparities that exist within communities of color throughout the United States. As the membership association for the federal Healthy Start programs, NHSA promotes the development of community-based maternal and child health programs, particularly those addressing the issues of infant mortality, low birth weight and racial disparities in perinatal outcomes.

With over 100 Healthy Start projects situated across the United States, the Association works to expand the capacity of community-based MCH programs and infant mortality preventive health services, thereby ensuring that all families have access to a continuum of affordable quality health care and related services. This range of care extends beyond the welfare of newborns and includes mothers, fathers, and families, thus affecting the entire community.
Jennie Joseph, CPM, is building a network of support to transform maternity outcomes in the USA. The National Perinatal Task Force (NPTF) is a virtual community of people who have a heart for women and children -- people who have heard the statistics, understand that the system is broken and want to make a practical difference in the health outcomes for mothers and babies.

Be a part of the change, be a part of the movement! Stand for mothers and babies right now. Your participation is critical!

The NPTF is a grassroots movement to start and grow Perinatal Safe Spots (PSS) in every maternal-toxic area, where birth outcomes for mothers and babies are unacceptably poor. It's a place to share ideas - what's working and what's not. The NPTF is here to support YOU supporting women and families.

Perinatal Safe Spots are emerging across the country. Find out how you can create a Perinatal Safe Spot in your community.

Uzazi Village: Walk to Eliminate Black Infant Mortality

Sherry Payne and Uzazi Village, partnering this year with the National Perinatal Task Force, walked from Columbia Missouri to the State capital in Jefferson City to get the word out about black infant mortality on September 26 and 27. Sherry Payne makes important points about infant mortality: "We want to increase awareness of the problem. Black infant mortality is a 'silent epidemic.' Even families affected by it don't realize that this is a systemic problem and that their babies are more at risk. We want to bring attention to this issue so that not only will affected communities have greater awareness, but so that our healthcare system and governmental agencies will put more resources toward solutions and interventions. Our awareness campaign is aimed at increasing awareness in the general public as well as the healthcare, education, legislative, and consumer advocacy communities."

Support Uzazi Village by donating and volunteering
Midwife Movement in L.A. - Stemming Infant Mortality

Black midwives in the Los Angeles area who are working to stem the rates of African-American babies dying for preventable reasons, were featured recently in an Aljazeera America article. Debbie Allen, CPM, and Racha Tahani-Lawler, CPM, are midwives at the Community Birth Center, a grass roots freestanding birth center founded to increase women and families' access to excellent prenatal and postpartum care and natural childbirth.

The Aljazeera article states that while the risk of low birthweight babies usually decreases as other disparities do, this isn't the case for black women. In fact, the correlation between exposure to racism and low birthweight is strongest among college-educated women. While research confirms that the chronic psychologic stress of racism contributes to premature birth and low birthweight for black babies, evidence suggests that babies delivered by midwives experience better outcomes. And yet, black midwives account for fewer than 2 percent of the 15,000 in the U.S.

Allen and Lawler have personally witnessed what it is like for women of color to give birth in the U.S. and have come to the grim realization that birth outcomes and experiences for black women in our country are far worse than for other ethnic groups. Lawler, a fourth generation black midwife, has responded by opening the Community Birth Center, and Allen is opening a prenatal clinic.

Allen says, "Black lives, they're threatened from the womb to the grave, so every time I see a black baby being born healthy to black parents that feel empowered, I think that's going to make all the difference as a people in what we ask for ourselves and what we ask of others."

Please donate to support the work of the Community Birth Center.

With all best wishes for better health for all mothers and babies,
Mary Lawlor, Executive Director

National Association of Certified Professional Midwives

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