



ILLINOIS MATERNAL & CHILD HEALTH COALITION

1256 West Chicago Avenue ♦ Chicago, Illinois 60642
Tel: (312) 491-8161 ♦ Fax: (312) 491-8171 ♦ Email: ilmaternal@ilmaternal.org
Website: www.ilmaternal.org

Maternal and Child Health Issues for consideration by Mayor-elect Rahm Emanuel

In order for Chicago to continue to be a national and worldwide leader in economic and cultural affairs, it is important for our city to have a healthy population, particularly when it comes to women and children.

According to the 2009 Report on Chicago Region Poverty produced by the Heartland Alliance Mid-America Institute on Poverty, the City of Chicago is home to over 1.4 million women and about 617,000 children under the age of 19. One child in every three is living in poverty and 3 in every 5 children are living in low-income families. Over half a million full-time workers in the Chicago Region are uninsured.

Mayor-elect Emanuel affords Chicago a unique opportunity as someone who directly worked with and supported President Obama to enact landmark health insurance reform legislation. Chicago should work to be a national leader by supporting municipal efforts to implement the Affordable Care Act to the fullest extent possible.

IMCHC looks forward to working with Mayor-elect Emanuel and his administration to ensure optimal health outcomes for women, children and their families. Our priority issues and recommendations are listed below:

Women's Health

We support health promotion efforts for women across the lifespan, regardless of childbearing status. In addition, the City of Chicago should continue to uphold a women's right to a full range of reproductive services, including access to contraceptives and abortion care coverage. Access to family planning services at city clinics is critical, particularly for low-income women who may not have access to these services elsewhere.

In addition to the numerous health benefits to infants, breastfeeding can also contribute significantly to improved health for new mothers. This includes lower rates of cancer, diabetes and increased and accelerated weight loss. IMCHC recommends that the City of Chicago promote breastfeeding-friendly policies such as:

- Ensure that city buildings have private spaces, that are not bathrooms, where new mothers can nurse their infants or pump breast milk.
- Support a city ordinance that supports breastfeeding in public places, similar to the policy that Toronto, Canada has had in place since 2007.
- Encourage hospitals, clinics and health providers in Chicago to adopt "baby-friendly"¹ (breastfeeding friendly) practices.

¹ Baby-friendly is a designation by the World Health Organization for hospitals that adopt 10-steps to promote and support breastfeeding. Visit www.babyfriendlyusa.org for more information.

Maternal and Infant Mortality

Despite being one of the wealthiest nations and spending the most per capita on health care, the US's infant mortality rate ranks well above all other developed countries, such as Japan and Germany, and even above several underdeveloped countries, such as South Korea and the Czech Republic. Illinois' statewide infant mortality rate is 6.6 deaths/1,000 live births—the infant mortality rate in Chicago is even higher, at 7.91 deaths/1,000 live births (2007 statistics). African American infants in Chicago die at a rate more than twice the statewide average. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' *Healthy People 2020* goal for infant mortality rates is 6.0 deaths/1,000 live births.

While maternal mortality rates are only available in city-wide, aggregated five-year data sets, the data for low-income African Americans shows that they are at an increased risk of dying as a result of pregnancy-related complications. From 2000-2004, there was only one recorded pregnancy-related death for White women in Chicago, compared to 27 African-American deaths. During the same time period, African-Americans accounted for nearly 75% of all maternal deaths while only representing about a third of all births.

While reductions in infant and maternal mortality require comprehensive program and policy solutions, city-level changes can help contribute to long-term reductions.

- IMCHC recommends that the Chicago Department of Public Health (CDPH) make the reduction of disparities in infant and maternal mortality a strategic priority.
- Identify new sources of funding to support programs aimed at reducing infant and maternal mortality and morbidity.
- Promote access to high quality prenatal care for pregnant women, and utilize such models as targeted intensive prenatal care management to address the psychosocial needs of populations at highest risk for infant/maternal morbidity and mortality.
- CDPH should continue to administer the Greater Englewood Healthy Start Initiative, and work closely with colleagues that administer the Chicago Healthy Start initiative at the Illinois Department of Human Services, and the Westside Healthy Start at Access Community Health Network.
- Additionally, IMCHC recommends that CDPH clinics that have prenatal care services offer patients the option of participating in Centering Pregnancy, an evidence-based model of group prenatal care, that result in improved birth outcomes, and other innovative maternity models of care.

School Health

A healthy child is a teachable child. In an effort to combat health related barriers to learning, school health centers bring quality health care services normally found in a doctor's office into a school setting, so that students are healthy and ready to learn. School health center services include immunizations, sports physicals, asthma management, and mental health counseling. Additional benefits include connecting students and families to social services, contributing to lowering school absenteeism, increasing a student's

ability to focus in class, and participation in extracurricular activities. It seems intuitive that when children and adolescents' health status improves, their ability to learn, and hence, their academic success also increases.

Of the 59 school health centers in operation throughout Illinois, 31 of these sites are in Chicago Public Schools, serving elementary, middle and high school students.

- IMCHC recommends that the school health center model be expanded to additional sites in the Chicago Public Schools.
- Require all Chicago Public Schools system to comply with the “Family Life and Comprehensive Sexual Health Education” policy approved by the Board of Education in August 2008.
- Ensure that the position of Director of Medical Affairs and Health Policy in Chicago Public Schools that works closely with CDPH is filled swiftly with a qualified and competent individual. This position has remained vacant since it was created and authorized by the City Council in 2008.

Immunizations

The infant immunization rate in Chicago for 2009 (the most recent data available) was 72%. Chicago ranks 5th highest out of the nation's 12 largest cities. While Chicago does well for a large city, it could do even better. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' *Healthy People 2020* goal for infant immunizations is 90%. Additionally, large pockets of dramatically under-immunized children and adults remain, with some Chicago community areas reporting early childhood immunization rates as low as 63%.

- IMCHC recommends that education about immunizations and access to vaccines be prioritized, particularly when it comes to low-income populations, communities of color and designated pockets of need.
- The Chicago Department of Public Health (CDPH) should maintain/expand its outreach, education, and vaccine distribution during flu season, particularly in communities of color.

Staffing:

- Prioritize the hiring for vacant dental health positions in CDPH clinics AND/OR work with federally qualified health centers/community-based organizations that can provide the dental health staffing in vacant oral health operatories to serve those in need of services.
- Prioritized the hiring of staff who conduct outreach, education and home visitation, to ensure that transient and hard-to-reach populations are reached. This includes, but is not limited to, community health workers and nurses.

About the Illinois Maternal and Child Health Coalition:

Since 1988, the Illinois Maternal and Child Health Coalition (IMCHC) has been fighting to improve the health of all women, babies, young people and families in Illinois. As an organization, we bridge the gap between policy makers and those affected by their decisions. Through education, we empower people to make healthy choices that strengthen families and communities.

IMCHC currently works in partnership with individual and organizational members on maternal and child health issues and provides leadership on four primary projects:

1. The *Chicago Area Immunization Campaign* focuses on achieving 90% immunization rates for children, adolescents and adults by identifying and removing barriers to immunization services and through education to families, providers and community members.
2. The *Illinois Coalition for School Health Centers* is a broad-based group of organizations and individuals united to educate the general public and policy makers about the efficacy of the school health center model and to expand and sustain centers through advocacy and technical assistance. This project has increased the number of school health centers from 23 to 59 and has succeeded in doubling state funding for these centers.
3. The *Illinois Premature Infant Health Network* brings together physicians, advocates, hospitals and community health organizations to increase access to quality health care for premature infants and their families in Illinois. By considering prematurity as a lifespan issue for children, the Network works to ensure continuity of care for premature infants from the NICU to high school graduation, focusing on early intervention, home visiting, and dental and mental health issues prevalent among premature infants. The Network also seeks to reduce the incidence of preterm labor, which currently occurs in one of every eight births in Illinois.
4. The *Campaign to Save Our Babies* seeks to reduce racial/ethnic health disparities in maternal and infant mortality by 50% in ten years and completely by 2033 by bringing together advocates and stakeholders in health, housing, education, economic development, public safety and education. Our local project in Chicago's Englewood neighborhood builds upon partnerships with the Greater Englewood Healthy Start Initiative, block clubs, elected officials, health/social service professionals and consumers to share health education and resources with women, adolescents, and families.

IMCHC also provides education and policy analysis about the Affordable Care Act, supports improvements in Illinois' oral health infrastructure and engages in efforts to enroll additional children and families into public health insurance programs.

To learn more, visit our website at www.ilmaternal.org.