



Meet Emma.



Emma is happy.



Her daddy plays with her.



Emma is growing.



She has books and toys
to help her learn.



Emma is healthy.

Today is Emma's birthday.





But not all babies are like Emma.

Some are born too small or too soon.

Some don't get adequate health care.

Some families can't afford the things
babies need to grow strong and healthy.

Too many babies die.

In Illinois each year, over 1,300 babies die before their first birthday.



How can we save our babies?

Research shows that poverty, family stress, poor health care, and racism make it hard for many babies to get a healthy start in life. Experts from around the state, organized by the Illinois Maternal and Child Health Coalition, have worked together to figure out family friendly policies to help *save our babies*. Here are their recommendations:

Help young people make wise choices.

Accurate information about health and reproduction can give young people the tools and resources to make informed decisions regarding their bodies and their futures.

We must:

- Increase the number of school based health centers throughout the state.
- Require the adoption and teaching of a standard K-12 curriculum that includes human development and anatomy, healthy lifestyles, goal-setting, self-esteem, family planning, nutrition, and parenting skills in all Illinois schools.
- Expand access to, and coverage for, comprehensive family planning services.

Health for the whole family.

Healthy babies begin with healthy families. Access to good health care throughout life helps to ensure that babies can get the care they need, that young girls can grow up strong and are able to sustain healthy pregnancies, that parents can adopt healthy lifestyles, and that families can pay for health care.

We must:

- Support national health care reform that will offer affordable, accessible, quality health care for all US residents and citizens.
- Promote incentives to individuals and health care systems to emphasize prevention in the delivery of health care and include community based approaches to prevention.
- Ensure that every individual and family has a medical home.

Give mom and dad a break.

The first months of life are critical in a child's development. Paid parental leave allows both parents to spend time with their newborn and support each other during this time without risking their jobs or their family's financial situation.

We must:

- Pass a federal 12 week paid leave policy for the birth or adoption of a child, as well as to care for a sick family member. If a federal paid leave policy is not forthcoming, consider a state 12-week paid leave policy.
- Guarantee job protection for all workers eligible for state paid leave benefits. Eligible workers should include part-time workers, and workers in small businesses.

Surround pregnant women and all parents with love.

Pregnancy, childbirth, and caring for a newborn bring extraordinary changes in a woman's life. Support from those around her is essential to create a healthy start for her new baby.

We must:

- Provide funding for effective parenting programs to be provided to all new families.
- Implement an integrated system of home visiting that includes public health nurses, community based doulas, and other support workers for every pregnant and postpartum woman.

Share the cost of raising kids.

Providing healthy food, a safe environment, adequate housing and other necessities puts a financial strain on families. Research shows that the birth of a baby is one of the leading contributors to “poverty spells” (when a family’s income falls below the amount needed to sustain basic needs). Providing ALL families with adequate income can help ease this additional burden.

We must:

- Ensure all parents have adequate income to provide for their families.
- Explore mechanisms such as children’s allowances, a negative income tax, guaranteed minimum income, children’s savings accounts, and individual development accounts (IDAs).

Insist on high–quality health care.

All too often, the quality of health care families receive is dependent upon their income or insurance status. Health is a basic human right and ALL babies and ALL families DESERVE high-quality care.

We must:

- Provide reimbursement for well-woman health care across the life span.
- Institute prenatal care approaches such as the use of certified professional midwives, centering pregnancy (group prenatal care), and the use of doulas, based on the latest evidence.
- Train health care professionals to provide excellent care regardless of race, income, or other factors.
- Support the natural process of childbirth – explore models that increase safety and reduce c-section rates and premature births while dramatically reducing malpractice costs.
- Require all Illinois birthing hospitals to promote and support breastfeeding by instituting the 10 steps to become a “Baby Friendly” hospital.
- Develop an adequate system to screen and refer all new mothers for post-partum depression and parenting support.
- Work with the Illinois Department of Healthcare and Family Services to develop a provider quality rating system based on claims data compared to national standards of care.
- Increase payment rates to providers who participate in the Medicaid program.
- Incorporate family planning into regular checkups.

Make the numbers work.

Three decades into the computer age, our medical and health data systems are woefully underdeveloped. The current data system in Illinois is fragmented, not user-friendly, and not up-to-date. This not only creates hassles for patients and health care providers but it also makes it difficult to get useful information that can lead to health care improvements for mothers and babies.

We must:

- Develop and provide incentives for the use of a universal electronic medical record system that can be linked to population based data sets such as birth certificate information, newborn screenings, Cornerstone, etc.
- Support the integration of state population based data sets, including but not limited to, vital statistics and Medicaid claims.
- Use the data systems to provide timely information to generate action while safeguarding privacy.

Help young parents get the services they need.

Case managers can help families get the services they need, but Illinois’ case management systems are often so overloaded and underfunded that they cannot benefit those they serve. It’s time we straightened out this mess.

We must:

- Support a one-stop-shopping approach for WIC, primary care, case management and mental health services.
- Develop a universal risk screening tool that can be used by all agencies to triage women to the appropriate case management program and reduce duplication of services.
- Create financial incentives for Family Case Management agencies to refer women to the appropriate case management program.
- Set quality standards (e.g. maximum case load) and increase funding to support effective program delivery.
- Provide training for case managers, WIC, and other program staff, to insure cultural competence and a complete understanding of programs.

Take on racism.

What does racism have to do with infant mortality? PLENTY! Persistent racism not only limits economic and other life opportunities, it also causes stress. Research shows that stress is a risk factor for poor birth outcomes. It is no wonder that, at all income levels, African-American babies are more likely to die in their first year than white babies.

We must:

- Begin with open and honest discussions of racism in school curricula, the media, and public forums.
- Educate the media about racial disparities in infant mortality and other health outcomes.
- Mandate that government officials and professionals who serve our communities be trained to understand and respect different cultures.
- End discriminating policies and practices in health care, education, housing, environment, and the criminal justice system.

Build strong communities for babies to come home to.

Babies flourish in healthy communities. A healthy community has jobs that pay enough to support a family; decent and affordable housing; safe streets and places to play; nutritious food; clean air and water; and thriving local shops and services.

We must:

- Provide more affordable housing for families by building more housing units, converting abandoned buildings into homes, enacting statewide rent control, and cracking down on predatory loan practices.
- Reform the way we fund schools in Illinois. The State of Illinois ranks WORST in the nation on education funding; only 26.9% of total state revenue goes towards K-12 education.
- Ensure universal access to early childhood services including 0-3 programs, day care, preschool, Head Start, etc.
- Support programs that give people the necessary skills to get and keep jobs.
- Explore ways to increase the availability of fresh produce and meats in low-income communities.
- Support community programs that foster nutrition, exercise, violence prevention, and education.
- Educate residents on managing family finances, avoiding predatory lending, building assets, owning property, understanding taxes, and investing.
- Fund community reintegration services for ex-offenders including expungement.
- Institute child-friendly practices at the community level such as the Child Ombudsmen, child-friendly cities, and baby-friendly hospitals.

You can help.

Sponsor and support public policies shown to reduce infant mortality. Educate the public about how we can give all our babies a healthy start. Support pregnant women and new mothers in your family and your community. Contribute to the Campaign to Save Our Babies. See our website for more details. www.ilmaternal.org





Illinois Maternal &
Child Health Coalition
1256 West Chicago Avenue
Chicago, Illinois 60642
312.491.8161
www.ilmaternal.org