

# The Big Deal

## about maternal health

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When we talk about reducing infant mortality, it's important to look at both maternal and infant health together—not as separate issues. A baby's health starts long before birth, and a mom's well-being plays a huge role in how things go during pregnancy and beyond. Among all infant deaths in 2023 in Ohio, prematurity-related conditions were the most common cause of death (30%). Addressing prematurity requires taking care of mom before baby is born, and even before pregnancy. If a mother is dealing with things like high blood pressure, diabetes, or even stress and anxiety, it can directly affect her baby's chances of being born healthy. By focusing on maternal health, Ohio can reach its infant mortality reduction goals.

It's also about more than just what happens in the doctor's office. Things like access to healthy food, stable housing, behavioral health resources, effective care coordination, and emotional support can make a big difference—for both mom and baby. Unfortunately, communities that face the most barriers to these basic needs often have the highest rates of infant mortality. Understanding social drivers of health requires evaluation and prioritization specific to the most burdened communities. We can't change what we don't measure. When we approach maternal and infant health as a connected system, we can build better, more equitable care that supports families, as a whole, instead of just treating problems after they show up.

At the end of the day, healthier moms mean healthier babies. And when mothers have access to the care and resources they need—not just during pregnancy, but after the baby is born too—they're in a much better position to give themselves and their child a strong, healthy start. By looking at maternal and infant health together, we can create a stronger safety net that helps families thrive from day one—and makes real progress in lowering infant mortality for good. We each play a role in ensuring women are supported before, during and after pregnancy because women's health is, indeed, a very big deal.