

Maternal deaths and disparities increase in Mississippi

January 27 2023, by Michael Goldberg



Brittany Lampkin of Yazoo County, extolls the Mississippi Black Women's Roundtable legislative agenda which includes extending postpartum coverage for Medicaid recipients up from the current 60-day window to 12 months, Thursday, Jan. 26, 2023, during a news conference at the Mississippi Capitol in Jackson. A three-time mother, Lampkin related her personal experiences as evidence for the need of greater health care and support for mothers. Credit: AP Photo/Rogelio V. Solis

Deaths from pregnancy complications have become more prevalent in Mississippi, and racial disparities in the health of those who give birth have widened in recent years, according to a report released Thursday by the state's Department of Health.

The [Mississippi Maternal Mortality Report](#) shows that the maternal mortality rate increased by 8.8% between 2013-2016 and 2017-2019, with the latter period being the most recent one analyzed by researchers.

Black, non-Hispanic women had a rate four times higher than white, non-Hispanic women. Meanwhile, the rate increased by 25% for Black women while falling 14% among white women. Of the [maternal deaths](#) directly related to pregnancy, 87.5% were determined to be preventable.

The grim figures arrive as the state is expecting more births each year as a result of the U.S. Supreme Court decision last summer overturning the 1973 *Roe v. Wade* ruling, which had established a nationwide constitutional protection for abortion. The court used a Mississippi case to overturn the case, a legal effort the state's leaders have lauded.

Mississippi's Republican-controlled state legislature has been debating whether to extend Medicaid coverage from 60 days to a full year after childbirth, a policy supported by State Health Officer Dr. Dan Edney and some other leaders.

"It is imperative that we take care of our most vulnerable populations now," Edney said Thursday in a statement. "This is the only way we can move Mississippi's [health status](#) off the bottom of the chart."

Lt. Gov. Delbert Hosemann has also supported extending postpartum coverage, a position that puts him at odds with state House Speaker Philip Gunn, a fellow Republican.



Cassandra Welchlin, executive director of the Mississippi Black Women's Roundtable, addresses reporters during a news conference by the group, during which they presented their legislative agenda which included extending postpartum coverage for Medicaid recipients up from the current 60-day window to 12 months, Thursday, Jan. 26, 2023, at the Mississippi Capitol in Jackson. Credit: AP Photo/Rogelio V. Solis

"We won the pro-life case and now we don't want to take care of our moms? I can't understand how you are able to make that kind of argument," Hosemann said at a Jan. 18 news conference.

State senators voted last year for an extension, but it failed in the House amid opposition from Gunn. The speaker has said this year that he

would back it only if it is supported by the state Division of Medicaid.

To compile the report released Thursday, a committee of doctors and nurses reviewed 93 deaths, 40 of which were determined to have been pregnancy-related. It found that 42.5% of the maternal deaths it identified occurred more than 60 days but less than one year after delivery.

Additionally, the committee found that 82.5% of the [women](#) who died due to pregnancy complications between 2017 and 2019 were Medicaid recipients.

According to the report, most of the deaths among Black, non-Hispanic mothers were attributed to cardiovascular conditions. Edney said increased access to healthy foods could reduce the prevalence of health issues that lead to cardiovascular disease.

Advocates from the Mississippi Black Women's Roundtable, an [advocacy group](#), gathered at the Capitol to urge lawmakers to extend postpartum coverage.

"Women of color in our state have some of the country's highest infant and maternal mortality rates," said Cassandra Welchlin, the group's executive director. "We will not only be changing policy, but we'll also be saving precious lives."

At a Jan. 13 legislative hearing, Edney said the state doesn't have the medical workforce to address a wide range of poor [health](#) outcomes. Mississippi has the nation's highest fetal mortality, infant mortality and pre-term birth rates.

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