

# To fight infant mortality, program gives pregnant Philadelphians \$1,000

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A program guaranteeing income for pregnant residents of three Philadelphia neighborhoods launched on Monday in a city-led effort to decrease infant mortality rates that are higher here than in any other

major city.

The Philly Joy Bank will provide expectant parents with \$1,000 a month for up to 18 months, beginning during pregnancy and continuing through their first year postpartum. Participants must be 18 or older and in at least their second trimester of pregnancy, and have a [household income](#) of less than \$100,000. They must also live in Nicetown-Tioga, Strawberry Mansion, or Cobbs Creek.

Those three neighborhoods see the highest percentages of infants with very low birth weights, usually an indication of a premature birth, said Nia Coaxum, the Joy Bank's program manager. Prematurity is the leading cause of infant deaths in the city, she said.

"The idea is that providing folks with extra cash during their pregnancy will lower stress, which also has [negative impacts](#) on the body, especially health-wise," Coaxum said. "We're really hoping that participants can use this money to address their [basic needs](#), which will then, in turn, improve their [health outcomes](#) and birth outcomes."

The Joy Bank's organizers also hope the funding will help address stark racial disparities in infant deaths in Philadelphia.

The idea for the program was developed through the health department's Community Action Network, a group of community members, [health systems](#), and organizations working on the issue.

"The infant mortality rate for black infants in Philadelphia is well over three times higher than that of a white infant in Philadelphia," said Stacey Kallem, the director of the Division of Maternal, Child, and Family Health at the city health department.

Guaranteed income programs for parents elsewhere have helped

decrease the number of premature births and babies born with low weights, Kallem said. A guaranteed income program in the Canadian province of Manitoba that provided [pregnant women](#) with \$81.41 Canadian dollars a month (about \$60 U.S.) was associated with a 21% drop in low birth weights and a 17.5% decrease in premature births, a 2016 study found. (This spring, the Manitoba benefit was increased to \$161.82.)

The Joy Bank's much larger \$1,000 benefit was developed after conversations with Black pregnant and postpartum women in Philadelphia.

"The community told us to tie the guaranteed income amount to something that's a meaningful line item in a monthly budget," Kallem said. "So we looked at various budget calculators for Philadelphia and for a family of four, a monthly budget for housing is around \$1,000 a month."

The Joy Bank is funded through donations from a number of area charities. Applications for the program opened Monday; the fund will conduct a lottery twice a month to select participants. Health officials intend to pilot the program for the first 250 mothers who participate, then will evaluate the program's effects before deciding whether to expand it.

After years of fundraising, Coaxum said she was thrilled to launch the [program](#).

"I'm just happy to be able to finally get this money into the hands of participants who need it. It's been a long time coming," she said.

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