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Ohio Infant Deaths in 2017 Second-Lowest on Record
While Racial Disparities in Birth Outcomes Continued

Evidence-Based Strategies Deployed in Key Communities to Reduce Black Infant Mortality

COLUMBUS – The number of Ohio infants who died before their first birthday declined to 982 in 2017 from 1,024 in 2016, according to a new report released by the Ohio Department of Health (ODH). It was only the second time since the state began keeping records in 1939 that Ohio had fewer than 1,000 infant deaths in a year, with the first time occurring in 2014. At the same time, the disparity in birth outcomes continued in 2017, with black infants dying at three times the rate as white infants.

“The data shows we are helping more babies in the state reach their first birthdays, but we still have a lot of work to do – particularly in eliminating racial disparities in birth outcomes,” said ODH Director Lance Himes. “Ohio is investing millions of dollars in local infant mortality and disparity initiatives, particularly in high-risk communities and populations.”

Nine Ohio counties and metropolitan areas accounted for close to two-thirds of all infant deaths, and 90 percent of black infant deaths, in Ohio in 2017: Butler Co., Cleveland/Cuyahoga Co., Columbus/Franklin Co., Cincinnati/Hamilton Co., Toledo/Lucas Co., Youngstown/Mahoning Co., Dayton/Montgomery Co., Canton/Stark Co., and Akron/Summit Co. Four of these counties saw fewer black infant deaths in 2017 – Butler, Franklin, Stark and Summit.

In all nine communities, local groups are pursuing evidence-based strategies and promising practices to reduce infant mortality and address racial disparities in birth outcomes supported by state and federal funding. A new strategy that began in October 2018 involves the use of “neighborhood navigators” to identify pregnant women in their community who may be at risk for a poor birth outcome and connect them with needed healthcare, social and other services in order to have a healthy pregnancy and deliver a healthy baby. In addition, maternal and infant health, including infant mortality and racial disparities in birth outcomes, are key health priorities in the state health improvement plan released by ODH last year.

While the number of black infant deaths during the post-neonatal period (28 – 365 days of life) declined by 7 percent from 2016 to 2017, the number of black infant deaths during the first 27 days of life (the neonatal period) increased by 9 percent. Infant deaths during the neonatal period are often the result of preterm birth or low birth weight and influenced by the health of the mother before and during pregnancy. Identifying at-risk women and connecting them to care can help reduce preterm birth and neonatal infant deaths.

Ohio’s current state budget dedicates nearly \$50 million to improving birth outcomes and addressing racial disparities. Ohio is also leveraging \$7.5 million in federal grants to support local infant mortality initiatives during the next year:

- To assist 27 Ohio counties at risk for poor birth or childhood developmental outcomes to expand local voluntary, evidence-based home visiting services to women during pregnancy, and to parents with young children.
- To assist 14 Ohio counties with the highest infant mortality rates for African-American babies to promote healthy pregnancies, positive birth outcomes, and healthy infant growth and development.

The leading causes of infant death in Ohio continue to be prematurity-related conditions – complications related to birth before 37 weeks of pregnancy, birth defects, obstetric conditions, external injury and Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS).

Infant mortality is defined as the death of a live-born baby before his or her first birthday. The infant mortality rate is calculated as the number of infant deaths during the first year of life per 1,000 live births. Ohio's goal is to reach the national objective of a 6.0 infant mortality rate or lower in every race and ethnic group. Ohio's infant mortality rate for all races declined from 7.4 in 2016 to 7.2 in 2017. The state's infant mortality rates for white and Hispanic infants declined in 2017, while the infant mortality rate for black infants increased. There have been small but significant decreases in Ohio's overall infant mortality rate for all races (an average of 0.5 percent per year) since 2000.

During the past eight years, Ohio has implemented a comprehensive range of initiatives to address infant mortality and will have invested more than \$137 million through state fiscal year 2019 at the state and local levels to help more babies reach their first birthdays.

The complete 2017 Ohio Infant Mortality Report including data by county, a list of new initiatives to address infant mortality, and a summary of initiatives over the past eight years is available [here](#).

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