

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS
MATERNAL MENTAL HEALTH DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC
CONGRESSIONAL BRIEFING
MAY 19, 2020

From Dr. Rahul Gupta, March of Dimes:

- **Screening and Treatment for Maternal Depression.** March of Dimes advocates for increased funding to HRSA'S Screening and Treatment for Maternal Depression and Related Disorders Treatment Program in the next CARES Act supplement. Currently, the program is funded at \$5 million, but with the proposed \$10 million funding request, programs that provide critically-needed and cost-effective lifelines for pregnant women and new mothers during vulnerable periods in their lives.
- **Moms MATTER Act of 2020 (HR 6143).** March of Dimes supports measures to help identify and treat maternal mental health disorders, including universal screening and treatment, education and surveillance. We are supportive of the Moms MATTER Act of 2020 (HR 6143), which establishes a Maternal Mental and Behavioral Health Task Force to improve mental and behavioral health outcomes for women throughout pregnancy and up to one year postpartum.
- **Emerging Threats To Moms and Babies.** Congress should immediately provide at least \$100 million to CDC to reinvestigate and improve the Emerging Threats to Moms and Babies initiative to provide real-time clinical and survey data on the impact of COVID-19 on pregnant women and their babies.

From Adrienne Griffen, Maternal Mental Health Leadership Alliance

- **Extend Medicaid for all eligible new mothers for a full year postpartum.** Medicaid covers almost 50% of births in the United States, providing healthcare for women during pregnancy, labor & delivery, and the postpartum period. However, in many states, new mothers risk losing their Medicaid coverage at 60 days postpartum, leaving tens of thousands of women uninsured at a medically vulnerable time in their lives. A few statistics underscore why it is vital to maintain a new mother's health insurance:
 - *Nearly 25% of maternal deaths occur after 6 weeks postpartum*
 - *The peak incidence of postpartum depression is 3-6 months postpartum.*
 - *The peak incidence for self-harm is 9-12 months postpartum.*For all these reasons, we advocate for extending Medicaid coverage to all new mothers for a full year postpartum.
- **Increase funding for state maternal mental health programs through HRSA's Screening and Treatment for Maternal Depression and Related Disorders Treatment Program.** In 2016, Congress provided grants to 7 states to create state programs to address maternal mental

health (note that 30 states applied for these grants, but funding was limited to \$5 million total). These state programs are extremely cost effective: MCPAP for Moms program costs just \$8.33 per year per mother. In contrast, the cost of NOT treating maternal mental health conditions in the United States is \$14.2 billion each year in lost wages and productivity of the mother and addressing poor health outcomes of the mother and child. All mothers should have access to the same level and quality of care.

- **Include representatives of all women in COVID-19 research and drug trials.** New mothers and mothers-to-be are experiencing significant stress and anxiety during the pandemic, and these concerns undoubtedly will continue until there is better understanding of how the coronavirus impacts pregnant women, their unborn babies, and their newborn infants. IN addition, women of color and women who live in poverty are disproportionately affected by both mental health issues and the coronavirus. Thus we advocate for expanding COVID-19 research to include women who are typically excluded from research, including
 - *Women who are pregnant or breastfeeding*
 - *Women of color*
 - *Women who live in poverty*
- **Support a robust COVID-19 stimulus package supporting mental health care.** The rates of mental health issues have sky-rocketed during the pandemic. According to the Kaiser Family foundation, almost 50% of Americans report their mental health has been negatively impacted due to worry and stress about the virus. Postpartum Support International reports that the number of women participating in online support groups increased 400% from February to April. We implore Congress to pass a COVID-19 stimulus package that focuses on mental health and provides funding to shore up our nation's behavioral health system.