MONTCO MAMAS: Putting Data into Action to Reduce Black Infant Mortality

Toscha Blalock, M.S.
September 1, 2021
Perinatal Periods of Risk (PPOR) Report

Executive Summary

Improving birth outcomes for Black women in Montgomery County, PA

Knowing that racial disparities exist for birth outcomes, the Montgomery Early Childhood Consortium PPOR subcommittee analyzed all birth and death records for women living in the county. The survival of babies of Black women (n=4,482) was compared to babies of White women (n=31,496), who had better outcomes.

In Montgomery County, babies of Black/African-American women are 2.6 times as likely to die as babies of White women.¹

We categorized each death by birthweight and age at death, and found that the greatest racial disparity is among very low birthweight babies (less than 3.3 pounds).²

To reduce the racial inequity, we need to increase babies of Black women born at healthy weights.

This is inequity. We can intervene.

To learn more about what could help Black/African-American women in Montgomery County have healthy babies, we held three community focus groups. Analysis of the birth and death records as well as content of the focus groups revealed key action areas:

- Nutrition and weight
- Health across the life course
- Interactions with healthcare providers
- Emotional and mental health support
- Informal and formal education
- Access to services

By focusing on these areas, we can reduce the number of very low birthweight babies of Black/African-American women. This will lessen the racial gap in fetal and infant survival.

Montgomery County PPOR Subcommittee 2020
For more information about this effort and our process so far: montgomeryppor.org/3356/Get-Involved-Disparities-in-Infant-Health

¹ 20.3 fetal and deaths per 1,000 births for babies of Black women compared to 7.9 deaths per 1,000 births for babies of White women
² Comparing 1) very low birthweight deaths to low and normal weight 2) fetal deaths, 3) newborn deaths, and 4) infant deaths
MontCo Mamas and the Maternal and Early Childhood Consortium “MECC”

- MECC
  - MECC Steering Committee
    - Common Agenda
      - Childhood Lead Poisoning
        - Moved to a different initiative
      - Centralized Referrals for Home Visiting (formerly PAC)
      - PPOR Planning
    - MONTCO MAMAS Strategic Plan
  - Backbone = Office of Public Health (OPH)
    - Theory of change
      - Backbone = Maternity Care Coalition (MCC)
        - Team: OPH & Strategy Arts
MontCo Mamas: Hope for All, Life for All

**Our vision**
A Montgomery County where each child born brings hope for our future and where all African American/Black women receive the resources, opportunities, and support needed to have healthy pregnancies and to welcome thriving children in the world.

**Our mission**
To remove inequities surrounding race and infant mortality to support healthy births for Black women in Montgomery County

**Our principles**
- The voice of the community is an equal partner
- Racial inequities are not caused by individual behaviors
- Racial biases in healthcare exist and must be addressed
- Cultural humility and trauma-informed practices are necessities
- All women deserve a safe and healthy pregnancy
- Resources must be physically, financially and culturally accessible to families

**Our strategic plan**
- **Educate the community about topics & resources**
  - Provide targeted education about reproductive health, overall health, parenting and other topics, such as empowerment
  - Increase awareness of community resources and services

- **Improve provider-patient relationships & communication**
  - Increase providers’ understanding of Black women’s experiences
  - Provide ongoing training on trauma-informed care, cultural humility, and respect for reproductive choices-to all providers, including office staff

- **Enhance care for pregnant and parenting women**
  - Provide increased medical and social support after birth
  - Improve nutrition support (i.e. nutrition consults, WIC eligibility screenings, education) and food access (i.e. grocery stores, WIC access)

- **Expand social support and mental health counseling**
  - Create peer support groups and safe spaces for community gatherings
  - Improve individual therapy options, i.e. family therapy and postpartum depression treatment
  - Remove stigma around mental health treatment

- **Strengthen service delivery across providers, organizations & sectors**
  - Increase connections between minority patients and minority providers
  - Increase use of allied health providers: doulas, home visiting nurses, lactation consultants, and patient advocates

**Background:** In Montgomery County, Black/African American women are 2.6 times more likely to have a fetal or infant death compared to White women. This strategic plan was developed in response to a study of racial inequities in local birth outcomes and was created with community residents and stakeholders.

**Contact:** Janet Panning, jpanning@montcoja.org, 610-278-5117, ext. 6724

**Last Updated:** 2.24.20
MontCo Mamas Sectors

- Healthcare System
- Maternal Support Org's
- Government
- Social Determinants of Health
- Support Network
- Insurance/MCOs
- Home Visiting Programs
- Policy Advocates

Moms
Planning Team Process

#1 - Feb
Kickoff

#2 - Mar
Prioritize the 12 recommendations – Part 1

#3 - Apr
Prioritize the 12 recommendations – Part 2

#4 - May
Create implementation plans – Part 1

#5 - Jun
Create implementation plan – Part 2

Equity Practices
**Discussion Format**

**Survey Questions**
- Which recommendations will advance MontCo Mama's goal the most powerfully?
- Which recommendations, if we implemented first, would enable other recommendations to happen more powerfully or easily?
- Which recommendations generate broad community energy, enthusiasm, and leadership?

**Breakout groups**
- What ideas do you have for approaches to doing this?
  - Short term
  - Long term
- Who would be potential partners in this initiative?
**Recommendation:** Increase use of allied health providers: doulas, home visitors, lactation consultants and patient advocates

**Major Activities: Short-term**
1. Create registry of allied health providers
2. Expand referral system
3. Increase awareness: create and implement distribution plan
   - Community settings
   - Provider offices/hospitals
   - High school & colleges

**Major Activities: Long-term**
1. Secure funding
2. Advocate for insurance coverage
3. Develop data system
4. Evaluate capacity to identify gaps
5. Address capacity gap
6. Encourage standards of practice

**Outcomes**
1. Families seek out referral system to connect with allied health providers
2. Referral system users return
3. Positive experiences with allied health providers
4. Data shows an increase in use of allied health providers
5. Every pregnant birthing person/parent is offered allied health provider services
**Recommendation:** Provide targeted education about reproductive health, overall health, parenting and other topics such as empowerment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major Activities: Short-term</th>
<th>Major Activities: Long-term</th>
<th>Outcomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Determine methods of educating community members (including peer groups)</td>
<td>1. Develop comprehensive plan for county-wide sustainable education</td>
<td>1. Multiple channels for receiving education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Develop content that builds on their current knowledge</td>
<td>2. Design a MontCo Mamas website</td>
<td>2. Materials/messaging includes culturally aligned definitions for successful pregnancies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Create educational standards</td>
<td>3. MontCo Mamas has strong collaboration with providers and hospitals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4. Comprehensive education plan that reaches all Black communities in MontCo</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Recommendation: Increase provider's understanding of Black women's experiences**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major Activities: Short-term</th>
<th>Major Activities: Long-term</th>
<th>Outcomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Provide onsite training</td>
<td>1. Incorporate into new hire training</td>
<td>1. Black women and Black birthing people report they received respectful care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Incorporate personal stories</td>
<td>2. Target Emergency Department staff</td>
<td>2. Providers treat Black women and Black birthing people’s pain the same as white women and white birthing people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Continue doctor/doula dialogues</td>
<td>3. Provider partners with social workers</td>
<td>3. System changes in the health systems identified and implemented</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. Introduce this training in medical school</td>
<td>4. Providers and hospitals have ongoing training</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Highlights

Collaborations
✓ Lived Experience Expert Chat and Chew
✓ Legislator engagement
✓ Learning Community panelists
✓ Jefferson MPH student internship

Media
✓ HealthSpark feature article
✓ Phila Magazine: online article
✓ Fox 29 TV interview
✓ Phila Magazine: June issue
Thank you!