

Extend Postpartum Maternal Medicaid Coverage

North Carolina is experiencing a maternal health crisis. Unsafe gaps in health insurance coverage, particularly for women on Medicaid and disproportionately women of color, are contributing to poor maternal and infant health outcomes. Medicaid covers more than half of all births in North Carolina,¹ but unfortunately, this coverage ends just 60 days after delivery – when many new parents and babies are medically vulnerable and experience physical and mental health challenges that are unique to the postpartum period. Extending Medicaid coverage for postpartum women can help to prevent maternal and infant deaths and help ensure new moms have continuous, uninterrupted access to care to address their ongoing health needs and properly care for their newborn and themselves.²

The CDC defines the postpartum period as extending through 12 months after the end of pregnancy, because women who have recently given birth have a range of important health needs that continue throughout an infant’s first year of life.³ When Medicaid coverage ends at 60 days after delivery, low-income women and particularly women of color – who are more likely to live in low-income households and be enrolled in Medicaid during their pregnancy – receive incomplete postpartum health care and are at risk for higher rates of serious illness and maternal mortality.⁴

Leading medical organizations support extending postpartum care and key postpartum services beyond 60 days, including the American College of Obstetricians, American Medical Association, American Academy of Family Physicians, American Academy of Pediatrics, American College of Physicians, American Osteopathic Association, American Psychiatric Association, and the Society for Maternal-Fetal Medicine. To date, 21 states and Washington, D.C. have taken legislative action to extend Medicaid coverage past 60 days postpartum.⁵

The COVID-19 pandemic has also changed the way pregnancy and postpartum care is provided. In many cases, new mothers are more isolated from typical postpartum support, such as family members or doulas, and women may be accessing services such as lactation consultations or postpartum checkups via telehealth. Continuity of coverage is even more important now given the other disruptions in care that new parents are facing during the pandemic.⁶

The Think Babies NC Alliance supports extending postpartum Medicaid coverage from 60 days to one year after delivery to provide new mothers with ongoing access to the physical and mental health services they need to stay healthy and raise healthy babies.

Why Is This Important to Do Now?

Extending postpartum health care coverage reduces maternal deaths.

Medicaid provides essential health care to both moms and their babies. One in three women experience a disruption in health insurance coverage before, during or after pregnancy. This often includes losing insurance at a time when they need it most.⁷

Ending postpartum coverage a few weeks after birth can result in severe and life-threatening medical issues like bleeding, infections, postpartum depression, and even death. Pregnancy-related deaths can occur up to one year after a baby is born. At least one-third occur after delivery.⁸

- In 2018, 12% of new moms in North Carolina reported having symptoms of depression.⁹
- In 2015, 15% of deaths occurred more than six weeks after birth.¹⁰
- Black women in North Carolina are nearly twice as likely to die than white women when it comes to maternal deaths.

15% of postpartum deaths occurred more than 6 weeks after birth.

63% of all pregnancy-related deaths were found to be preventable.

41% could have been avoided with access to health care and other ongoing supports.

In 2015 (*the most recent year for which data are available*), 63% of all pregnancy-related deaths were found to be preventable. 41% could have been avoided if new moms were able to access health care and other ongoing supports.¹¹ Extending postpartum Medicaid coverage from 60 days to 12 months is an important step in making sure new parents are able to take care of themselves and their babies.

Extending postpartum health care coverage reduces infant mortality and promotes healthy development.

North Carolina has one of the highest infant mortality rates in the nation. Black infants are more than twice as likely than infants in white families to die before their first birthdays.¹² Extending postpartum Medicaid coverage promotes healthy development for babies. When new moms are healthy, they can bond with and care for their infants.

Extending coverage also supports women in need of treatment for mental health or substance use disorders, allowing them to stay actively engaged in parenting. Guaranteeing 12 months of continuous health coverage postpartum helps babies stay healthy during their first year of life. Extending postpartum Medicaid coverage is an effective way to keep both moms and babies healthy and safe, while ensuring families start off on the right path.

INFANT MORTALITY RATE

per 1,000 live births

WHITE BABIES	4.7
LATINX BABIES	5.6
BLACK BABIES	12.5



Think Babies™ NC Alliance

The Think Babies™ NC Alliance seeks to ensure that North Carolina's youngest children, prenatal to age 3, benefit from effective and equitable public policies, programs, and funding so that all children have what they need to thrive: healthy beginnings, supported families, and quality early care and learning experiences.

For more information:

Think Babies™ NC Alliance: Info@ThinkBabiesNC.org

¹NC Department of Health & Human Services. NC Medicaid and NC Health Choice Annual Report SFY 2020. Retrieved from <https://files.nc.gov/ncdma/SFY2020-MedicaidAnnualReport-20201223.pdf>

² American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG). Extend Postpartum Medicaid Coverage. Retrieved from <https://www.acog.org/advocacy/policy-priorities/extend-postpartum-medicaid-coverage>

³ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Pregnancy mortality surveillance system. <https://www.cdc.gov/reproductivehealth/maternal-mortality/pregnancy-mortality-surveillance-system.htm>.

⁴ American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG). Extend Postpartum Medicaid Coverage. Retrieved from <https://www.acog.org/advocacy/policy-priorities/extend-postpartum-medicaid-coverage>

⁵ National Academy for State Health Policy. View Each State's Efforts to Extend Medicaid Coverage to Postpartum Women Retrieved from <https://www.nashp.org/view-each-states-efforts-to-extend-medicaid-coverage-to-postpartum-women/>

⁶ Eckert, E. "Preserving the Momentum to Extend Postpartum Medicaid Coverage," Women's Health Issues, September 2020.

⁷ American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG). Extend Postpartum Medicaid Coverage. Retrieved from <https://www.acog.org/advocacy/policy-priorities/extend-postpartum-medicaid-coverage>

⁸ Ranji, U., Gomez, I., & Salganicoff, A. (2020). Expanding Postpartum Medicaid Coverage. Kaiser Family Foundation. Retrieved from <https://www.kff.org/womens-health-policy/issue-brief/expanding-postpartum-medicaid-coverage/>

⁹ Centers for Disease Control (CDC). Prevalence of selected maternal and child health indicators for North Carolina, Pregnancy Risk Assessment System (PRAMS), 2016-2017. Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/prams/prams-data/mch-indicators.html>

¹⁰ Small, M.J., Pettiford, B., Shuler, T.O., & Jones-Vessey, K. (2020). Addressing maternal deaths in North Carolina: Striving to reach zero. North Carolina Medical Journal, 81(1), 55-62 Retrieved from <https://www.ncmedicaljournal.com/content/ncm/81/1/55.full.pdf>

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² NC Department of Health & Human Services State Center for Health Statistics. 2019 North Carolina Infant Mortality Report. Retrieved from <https://schs.dph.ncdhhs.gov/data/vital/ims/2019/2019rpt.html>