

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Connections to Prenatal, Postpartum Resources Streamlined Through Howard County Health Navigation Program

Columbia, MD – The Howard County Health Department announced the launch of a navigation program to assist pregnant people, families and healthcare providers with accessing information about prenatal, postpartum and infant resources available in Howard County. **This service is provided at no cost and is open to all pregnant and postpartum people in Howard County.**

Howard County Government has committed more than \$137,000 annually over three years to support the Perinatal Equity and Care for Everyone (P.E.A.C.E.) Project, part of a \$1.7 million investment with the goal of improving reproductive, maternal and infant health in the County. The grant for these expanded maternal and child health programs was made available to the Health Department through American Rescue Plan Act funds received by Howard County.

“Our innovative PEACE program will truly be lifesaving. We will help uninsured and underinsured access care and overcome obstacles,” said Howard County Executive Calvin Ball. “Through our record funding of \$3 million over the last two fiscal years, we are doing our part to provide more access to quality prenatal and maternal health care. We cannot be complacent while disturbing trends in maternal deaths rise, and this is an important step in building a healthier community for all.”

The United States has one of the highest rates of maternal mortality among high-income countries and rates have been increasing, including in Maryland. Incidence of Severe Maternal Morbidity events - life threatening conditions and complications from labor and delivery - have been steadily increasing since 2019. In 2021, Howard County’s preterm birth rate rose to 11%, according to the [March of Dimes](#), higher than many neighboring jurisdictions and with significant racial disparities, especially among Black women.

“Even in Howard County, an area of high educational attainment and high income levels, health disparities exist, including poor birth outcomes among babies and individuals of color,” said Howard County Health Officer Dr. Maura Rossman. “Our hope is that this program can simplify the process for our residents to access the healthcare and support they need to have healthy pregnancies and healthy babies.”



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“The Board of Health is committed to supporting and sustaining the health of our County’s pregnant residents, our youngest and most vulnerable residents and their families,” said Howard County Board of Health Chair Anthony C. Wisniewski, Esq. “We applaud the foresight and financial commitment that the County Executive has provided for this initiative.”

The P.E.A.C.E. Project Care Navigator completes a needs assessment and assists the client in determining which services best meet their needs, then provides a warm handoff to appropriate community resources.

“Through focus groups we learned that many residents were not aware of the programs and services already available in the County to support healthy pregnancies and healthy babies,” said Nyanie Henriquez, P.E.A.C.E. Project Program Coordinator. “The goal of this project is to increase knowledge of and access to pregnancy support and a wide variety of parenting programs and community care resources. Through one-on-one communication with the client, we are able to assess a person’s specific needs, provide them with assistance, and ensure they receive the proper care to support a positive birth outcome.”

One area of focus into the expansion of resources to improve birth outcomes is increasing access to community-based care and doulas. Doulas play a crucial role in improving birth outcomes by providing continuous support and care to expectant mothers before, during and after childbirth. Studies have found this support to be especially important among high-risk women of color. The Health Department has partnered with the organization MOMCares to train doulas and increase access to doulas in Howard County.

“MOMCares is honored to join the charge with Howard County to correct the Black Maternal Health crisis by bringing the compassionate care of doulas to the area,” said MOMCares CEO Ana Rodney. “Together we will accomplish great things.”

Referrals into the P.E.A.C.E. Project can be requested using [this online form](#). More information about the P.E.A.C.E. Project and other Maternal Health Programs available through the Howard County Health Department can be accessed by visiting our [website](#).