

# Bridging the Gap: Improving Maternal and Rural Health Symposium

## Visual Report

Monday, Oct. 30, 2023



PRESENTED BY:



# Symposium Summary

On Oct. 30, 2023, more than 250 people came together in person and online for Bridging the Gap: Improving Maternal and Rural Health Symposium. It was a day of education and discussion on ways we can work together to improve birth outcomes for Iowa families. The event was hosted by *Healthy Birth Day, Inc.*, the Iowa-based nonprofit organization that created the *Count the Kicks* stillbirth prevention program.

“The data was very informative and eye opening! It’s so exciting to see so many different organizations coming together to improve rural healthcare, and maternal outcomes! We need to focus our money on prevention and meeting people where they are, and continue serving them postpartum as well as during pregnancy. It is very disheartening to realize how often maternal and stillborn deaths are occurring in our society. Makes me realize how important our work is.”  
-Symposium Attendee



# Symposium Themes



## IOWA HAS SEEN SOME SUCCESS

Things are happening across the state that are working: midwifery residency, Iowa Maternal Quality Care Collaborative, stillbirth prevention, and doula programs. Another success is the home visitation program, which is available in all 99 of Iowa's counties. Much of what is working is based in evidence.



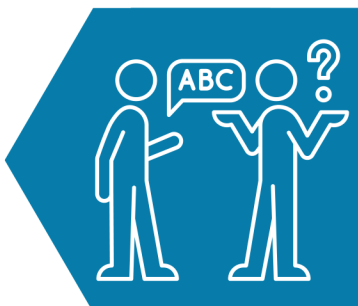
## COLLABORATION IS KEY

There are a lot of existing programs in the state that are successful, but getting people to the services they need can be a barrier. Research shows the best outcomes occur when supports are provided to the family prior to the birth of the child, which is why we should strive to enroll families prenatally. Symposium attendees identified the need for an easier way to identify what programs are available for families and how to connect families to needed supports at the right time.



## IDEAS FOR REFORM

Our state has already implemented some important solutions. Symposium attendees and speakers also brought forth additional ideas to improve outcomes for families including universal screenings, providing financial compensation for use of universal screenings, equitable pay for midwifery care and doula programs, and addressing reimbursement rates between a midwife vs. an Ob/Gyn.



## FIND SOLUTIONS TO OVERCOME BARRIERS

Symposium attendees identified the top barriers to implementing changes to be cost, lack of resources or equipment, lack of administrative support, and issues with insurance or reimbursement. Lack of consensus or professional guidelines and lack of time to assess or counsel patients were also identified as barriers.

“Collaboration and coordination across programs is essential to address the gaps in rural access to and use of maternal/fetal health services.” -Symposium Attendee

# Opportunities

“It is helpful to know that my practice/county isn't the only one going through the same experiences and barriers. It is wonderful that we are all finally coming together to discuss what works and what we could try.” -Symposium Attendee

## 4 out of 5 pregnancy-related deaths are preventable\*

**Empowering Maternal Wellness through Community Connections.** Attendees and speakers shared that we (as a state) should focus on creating a seamless network that empowers and supports expectant and new mothers. We can delve into innovative strategies and initiatives that foster a sense of community, providing a roadmap for effective outreach and engagement. When we work together, we can build a foundation that ensures every mother and pregnant person has access to the resources necessary for a healthier, more supported journey into motherhood.

**Unlocking Access to Transformative Healthcare Practices.** There is a dynamic landscape of impactful initiatives spanning the state, such as midwifery residency, the Iowa Maternal Quality Care Collaborative, and an effective network of home visitors in all of Iowa's 99 counties. We must find a way to navigate challenges in participation, and to delve into the shared struggles of engaging individuals in these essential endeavors. We should explore collaborative approaches to overcome participation barriers and recognize that collaboration and partnership are the linchpins to fostering widespread involvement.

**Inspiring Change through Case Studies.** Attendees and speakers shared that we (as a state) should explore the success story of Western Wisconsin Health as a beacon of innovation. Uncover their achievements in achieving higher VBAC rates, executing planned vaginal breech births, and promoting water births. Delve into their strategy of building a robust OB unit with a stellar regional reputation rooted in their mission. Understand the significance of fostering relationships with women, families, and birth workers in the community. Engage in a roundtable discussion centered on the needs of birth workers in hospital transfer situations, emphasizing a transformational mindset and prioritizing the deserving needs of pregnant patients.

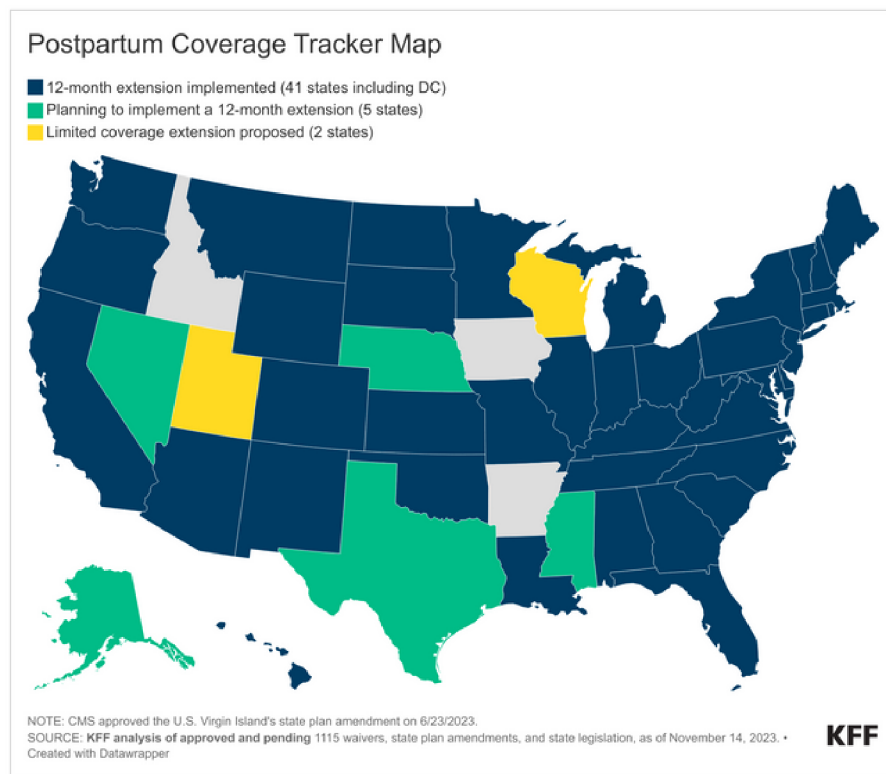
“This conference has made me want to change up how we plan and execute prenatal and postpartum services and care and how to better encourage staff by acknowledging and rewarding the work they do. It also has given me a better perspective on how to really try to understand the client, their families and their challenges.” -Symposium Attendee

\* “Four in 5 pregnancy-related deaths in the U.S. are preventable.”  
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

# Opportunities

Attendees want us to discuss the imperative to extend postpartum Medicaid coverage beyond the conventional 60 days postpartum, drawing inspiration from the successful implementation of a 12-month extension in 38 states.

## Medicaid Postpartum Coverage Extensions: Approved and Pending State Action as of Nov. 14, 2023



The Medicaid program finances about 4 in 10 births in the U.S. Federal law requires states to provide pregnancy-related Medicaid coverage through 60 days postpartum. After that period, some postpartum individuals may qualify for Medicaid through another pathway, but others may lose coverage, particularly in non-expansion states. **Iowa is one of only three U.S. states that has not implemented and is not currently planning to implement postpartum Medicaid coverage expansion.**

# 1 in 4 people of Color could benefit from Medicaid expansion\*



# Next Steps

“There are more entities out there to help bridge the gaps than I realized. I need to expand upon the seeds that have been planted in my brain” -Symposium Attendee

1. **Convening a Stakeholder Group of more than 30 individuals who expressed an interest in continuing discussions and working to develop actionable plans to drive meaningful change.**

“Many wonderful programs exist in Iowa. We need to continue to grow access, referrals and awareness to improve maternal health outcomes. -Symposium Attendee

2. **Developing a central resource for professionals working with expectant parents to access and easily find programs, organizations, and resources to support Iowa families during their prenatal and postpartum journey.**

“We have a lot of statistics of how bad maternal mortality is in rural areas, and for Black/Brown women, but we need more of ‘how to fix it?’ Need to bring in speakers with actual action plans, shared from other states, countries!” -Symposium Attendee

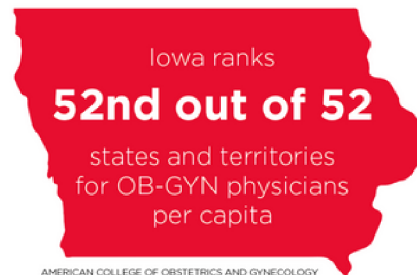
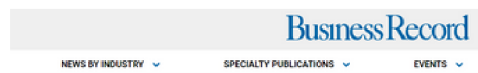
3. **Exploring the possibility of a Fall 2024 Symposium on Maternal and Rural Health in Iowa.**

## ATTENDEE RESOURCES:

- [Symposium Webpage](#)
- [Speaker Bios](#)
- [Presentation Slides](#)
- [Exhibitor Resources](#)
- [IHHS- Maternal Morbidity and Mortality in Iowa Report](#)
- [Mom’s Meals Member Handout](#)
- [Event Recordings on YouTube](#)

## IN THE NEWS:

[Maternal health symposium highlights access challenges, proposes new solutions](#)



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