

Insights

Why Improving the Lives of Moms and Babies calls for #BlanketChange

NICHQ joins more than 100 organizations and the March of Dimes in calling for drastic #BlanketChange to keep more mothers and babies alive. It's appalling that every 12 hours in our country, a woman dies from pregnancy-related causes, and 60% of those deaths are preventable. We must do better. As individuals and healthcare professionals, we need to examine the deep inequities that continue to exist in American life – disparities that result in health outcomes manipulated by racism and implicit bias, affecting access to care, the quality of that care, and ultimately, whether mothers and babies live or die under that care.

We are not the first to say it, and it needs repeating: Racism is finally starting to be acknowledged as the public health crisis it is. Inequities in social determinants of health fueled by racism have long disproportionately hindered Black, Hispanic, and Indigenous children from reaching their optimal health. As a mission-driven nonprofit dedicated to driving dramatic and sustainable improvements in the complex issues facing children's health, we know racism hurts caregivers and children every day, as it has for generations. One of the most important factors in a child's health outcomes are the health outcomes of their parents – the toll of chronic stress, higher rates of preterm birth, and mental health problems threaten the well-being of our nation's future leaders, exponentially compounded by the toll of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The #BlanketChange campaign focuses on three key elements of change that NICHQ remains committed to:

1. Equity: Eliminating racial and ethnic health disparities and driving economic, social, and health equity by focusing on prevention, treatment, and social determinants of health.

NICHQ's commitment: As there is complicity in silence, our equity voice at NICHQ has only grown. Though at times, it can feel uncomfortable to work through and unclear how to make a difference, the upside is that when our voices join together to [speak out against racism](#), sexism, and other forms of oppression, the opportunity to [seek an improved approach to public health for the new decade](#) reveals itself.

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But words aren't enough – it takes intentional action to make real progress. To infuse both awareness and accountability throughout the organization, we have established an explicit equity commitment as part of our 2021 strategic plan, including our Board of Trustees, leadership team, projects teams, and all staff. All of NICHQ's projects have adopted an equity lens to address social determinants of health, and all of our staff are committed to integrating this mindset into all of our work.

NICHQ's commitments: Projects that focus on equity and addressing social determinants of health include our [Supporting Healthy Start Performing Project](#), which works to eliminate disparities in infant mortality and perinatal outcomes by building capacity and improving systems of care in 101 communities across 34 states. In addition to implementing a safe infant sleep and breastfeeding safety bundle as part of our [National Action Partnership to Promote Safe Sleep Improvement and Innovation Network \(NAPPSS-IIN\)](#), NICHQ provides technical assistance to states on integrating safe sleep and breastfeeding promotion efforts and provides training and resources to systems and community groups, using a conversations approach to engage families and overcome barriers in integrating safe sleep and breastfeeding. In support of our [Sickle Cell Disease Treatment](#) project, NICHQ is offering upcoming webinars on [Leading Equity Now in Systems of Care](#) and [Pediatric Telehealth Strategies During and Post the COVID-19 Pandemic](#), informed by family interviews. NICHQ also joins more than 100 other child health organizations in calling for the establishment of a White House Office on Children and Youth and a White House Conference on Children and Youth to elevate the needs of children, youth, and their families.

2. Access: Improving access to care through expanding critical health programs and closing gaps in coverage.

NICHQ's commitment: NICHQ conducts specific projects focusing on access to care, such as the New York State Perinatal Quality Collaborative (NYSPQC), an initiative led by the New York State Department of Health (NYSDOH) Division of Family Health (DFH) in partnership with NICHQ. The NYSPQC aims to provide the best, safest and most equitable care for pregnant and postpartum people and for infants in New York State (NYS) by collaborating with birthing hospitals, perinatal care providers, professional organizations and other key stakeholders to prevent and minimize harm through the translation of evidence-based guidelines to clinical practice.

Birthing hospitals across the state are collaborating with SDOH on one or more of their [current intervention projects](#), including the NY State Birth Equity Initiative, which will help New York State birthing hospitals and centers identify how individual and systemic racism impacts birth outcomes at their facility and will take actions to improve both the experience of care and perinatal outcomes of Black birthing people in the communities they serve.

3. Prevention: Addressing preventable health conditions through expanding research and improving maternal morbidity and mortality data collection.

NICHQ's commitment: We support the field through expanding research and collective learning with partners. Following NICHQ's work leading the Collaborative Improvement and Innovation Network to Reduce Infant Mortality (IM CoIIN), a national initiative to improve birth outcomes and decrease infant mortality rates, NICHQ has produced a series of case studies examining disparities, targeted interventions, policy efforts, and emerging issues in Kansas, Massachusetts, Mississippi, and Oklahoma to identify successes and opportunities that all states can consider. Read the entire case study and [register for the upcoming webinar](#).

As an organization working to improve the health of all children, it makes the work to dismantle systems oppression even more vital. Our vision of a world where every child achieves optimal health is only viable where systems of equity, justice, and respect for all abound. We can improve the health of ALL children when ALL children are allowed to play together on a level field. It is our shared responsibility to create an environment where these equitable and just systems can flourish. We acknowledge the work begins internally, and NICHQ's commitment is here for the long term.