



Leveraging Advocacy to Transform Health

Extending Ohio's Postpartum Medicaid Coverage

bi3 Learning Series
2023

Summary

In 2021, bi3, a health funder in Greater Cincinnati, and Groundwork Ohio, a nonpartisan advocacy organization, partnered to pursue policy change that would improve the health of Ohio mothers and young children. The primary goal: Advocate for the extension of Medicaid postpartum coverage from 60 days to one year following birth. This policy change was successfully included in Ohio's FY 2022-2023 appropriations bill and implemented by Ohio Medicaid in April 2022. It is estimated 21,000 new moms will benefit from this extended coverage annually. This paper captures the environment, key drivers, activities and lessons from this successful effort. We believe these lessons will be of value to other philanthropic organizations and their partners seeking to create policy and systems change for their communities.

Why extend postpartum Medicaid coverage?

Mary* began receiving prenatal care for her high-risk pregnancy at 20 weeks. Just a few months before her first appointment, Mary had experienced a psychiatric hospitalization. At her prenatal appointment, Mary was provided access to mental health services and a connection to a community health worker for other resources. Mary delivered without any complications. Due to continuous medical coverage, Mary was still able to access mental health support after her postpartum visit, ensuring that she received the care she needed to be able to care for her infant.

**To respect her privacy, Mary is a pseudonym.*



Women in the United States are at greater risk of dying from pregnancy-related complications than women in other industrialized countries, and severe maternal morbidity (unexpected outcomes that impact a woman's health) has increased by 75% in the last 10 years.



Each year,

60,000 women

are affected by severe maternal morbidity following the birth of a child¹

Ohio's severe maternal morbidity rate is 71.1 per 10,000 deliveries, resulting in more than

3,600 deaths

from 2016-2019²



"The United States has the highest maternal mortality rate among high-income countries and is the only one where maternal mortality is increasing. In 2020, the maternal mortality rate in the U.S. was 23.8 deaths per 100,000 live births, a 14% increase from the prior year, yet most pregnancy-related deaths are preventable. The rate among Black women is nearly three times that of White women. These racial disparities are linked to structural racism, underlying chronic conditions, disparities in access to healthcare and many of the social determinants of health."

– The Uneven Burden of Maternal Mortality in the U.S.³

¹ "Severe Maternal Morbidity in the United States: A Primer." *Commonwealth Fund*, 28 Oct. 2021.

² "Severe Maternal Morbidity and Racial Disparities in Ohio, 2016-2019." *The Ohio Department of Health*, 2020.

³ "The Uneven Burden of Maternal Mortality in the U.S." *National Institute for Health Care Management (NIHCM)*, 2 Aug. 2022.

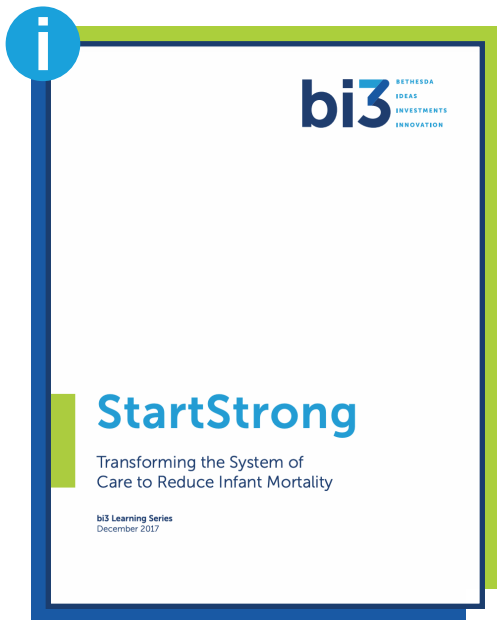
According to the Ohio Department of Health, women of color are disproportionately impacted, with a maternal mortality rate more than 2.5 times that of White women. **The majority of maternal deaths occur in the first year postpartum. Over half of these deaths are considered preventable⁴.**

"When a new mother loses her Medicaid coverage at 60 days postpartum, we lose the ability to address any issues related to the birth and to improve her health for future pregnancies."

– OBGYN provider

The Ohio Pregnancy Assessment Survey shows 90% of new Ohio mothers report receiving a postpartum visit. However, Medicaid recipients were significantly less likely to report completing a postpartum visit⁵.

For more than a decade, bi3 has invested in innovative approaches to improve maternal and young child health. One of the key drivers to improving health outcomes is access to high-quality care that supports women's health and well-being. Since 2012, bi3 has been fueling a community-wide initiative, engaging competing healthcare systems and community-based organizations, to create and implement a woman-centered model of care to improve Hamilton County, Ohio's infant mortality rate. This model of care—initially called **"StartStrong"**—has since spread throughout the community, and in 2021, Hamilton County reported the lowest infant mortality on record⁶.



bi3 leverages its strategic relationship with TriHealth, one of Greater Cincinnati's leading healthcare systems, and community grantees to listen and learn about young families' challenges and opportunities. In 2019 and 2020, TriHealth OBGYNs shared the challenges of providing high-quality, consistent care to women when Medicaid's maternity coverage ended 60 days after birth. Without medical coverage, women were less likely to receive follow-up care for conditions like hypertension, one of the critical drivers of maternal mortality and morbidity⁷. It also made it more difficult for women to receive care before a subsequent pregnancy. Losing medical coverage impacted women's access to mental healthcare, leaving conditions like postpartum depression and anxiety untreated. Seeing an opportunity to pursue a policy-level change in Ohio, where more than one-half of the births each year are insured by Medicaid⁸, bi3 began to explore potential advocacy partners.

To advocate for the extension of postpartum coverage, bi3 partnered with Groundwork Ohio, a nonpartisan advocacy organization with a mission of laying a solid foundation for Ohio's kids, families and communities. Groundwork Ohio brought expertise, a successful track record and a shared focus on maternal and young child health. Groundwork Ohio has an extensive collaborative network, including many of bi3's grantee partners. In January 2021, bi3 awarded Groundwork Ohio a three-year, \$1.2 million grant to support the launch of the Center for Maternal and Young Child Health, with the primary goal of extending Medicaid postpartum coverage.

⁴ "A Report on Pregnancy-Associated Deaths in Ohio 2008-2016." *The Ohio Department of Health*, 2019.

⁵ "The Postpartum Visit." *The Ohio Department of Health*, 30 Jan. 2014.

⁶ "A Community Stronger Together - Annual Report 2021." *Cradle Cincinnati*. 2022.

⁷ "A Report on Pregnancy-Associated Deaths in Ohio 2008-2016." *The Ohio Department of Health*, 2019.

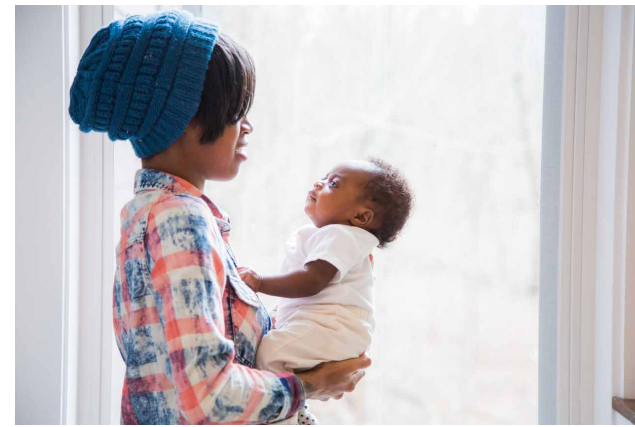
⁸ "Report on Pregnant Women, Infants and Children – SFY 2020." *The Ohio Department of Medicaid*, 19 Jul. 2021.

Collaborating for Success

Groundwork Ohio and others engaged in various advocacy activities, including meeting individually with legislators and state department leadership, providing research and background materials, and testifying at various committees and meetings. **By lifting the voices of families impacted by the issue, these organizations successfully pushed for the extension of postpartum coverage. It was included in the state budget and began being offered to eligible pregnant women on April 1, 2022.** The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) estimate that, in Ohio, up to 21,000 new moms annually will be eligible for extended coverage⁹.

While the extension of postpartum coverage was the result of the combined efforts of many advocates, Groundwork Ohio leveraged key strengths to be successful:

- **Focus:** A clear focus and messaging around mothers and babies and the impact of health coverage on outcomes. This broad framing allowed multiple stakeholders to connect to the issue.
- **Expertise:** The deep knowledge of experts and those with lived experience told the story of women's experiences in healthcare, the impact on women's and infants' health, what postpartum care should look like and how Medicaid's resources could be deployed differently.
- **Relationships:** Groundwork Ohio has a reputation as a trusted, nonpartisan resource and has built a network of advocacy partners as well as relationships with legislators and state leaders. These relationships enabled Groundwork to be at the right tables when conversations were happening. Groundwork Ohio also has relationships with national networks that were advocating around this issue, bringing additional research and resources to their advocacy.
- **Capacity:** The funding provided by bi3 and other funders allowed Groundwork Ohio to create dedicated capacity for the issue of postpartum coverage. This enabled the organization to engage with stakeholders in a deeper way, closely monitoring the process as it unfolded, and to be present at hearings and other meetings where postpartum coverage was being discussed.
- **Flexibility:** Groundwork Ohio deployed a variety of approaches and tactics to advocate for change. It remained nimble to respond to environmental shifts and leveraged its partners to engage in advocacy. This flexibility allowed Groundwork Ohio to take advantage of opportunities as they presented and shift capacity to where there was greater acceleration toward the goal.



"I want voices to be heard and measures to be taken into the future. I want families to get the help they need. I want to make a change."

– Quote from the Family Listening Sessions hosted by Ohio's Eliminating Racial Disparities in Infant Mortality Task Force

⁹ "HHS Approves 12-month Extension of Postpartum Medicaid and CHIP Coverage in Hawaii, Maryland, and Ohio." *Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services*, 16 Aug. 2022.

Through this success, both Groundwork Ohio and bi3 developed best practice tactics that will inform future efforts and that other advocates can draw upon, whether they are direct advocacy organizations or funders of the work.

Groundwork Ohio

- ✓ Stick to the mission and have clear goals while remaining flexible
- ✓ Build the capacity of the organization to engage in advocacy and support partners to do the same
- ✓ Dedicate focus on deepening, broadening and nurturing a network of partners to advance the work more quickly
- ✓ Constantly assess and recalibrate between a deep strategic focus on a specific goal and a broad agenda, while moving nimbly between both as opportunities present themselves
- ✓ Create trusted relationships with policy leaders to get invited to the table but also have the finesse to “bring your own chair”

bi3

- ✓ Provide flexible funding that allows organizations to build capacity and remain nimble in a challenging policy environment
- ✓ Build trusted relationships with grantee partners that leverage their strengths and expertise toward a shared goal
- ✓ Guide progress and learning through conversations with the grantee but also through a broader network and understanding of the landscape—don’t rely solely on the grantee for information, do your own homework and knowledge building
- ✓ Understand (at the staff and Board levels) that policy and systems change is a long game—celebrate the immediate wins and build stamina for the future



While the expansion of postpartum coverage in Ohio is a clear win—making an extra year of medical coverage available to more than 21,000 new moms—the work is not complete. The implementation of the extension must be evaluated to ensure that the benefit is reaching all eligible women and leading to more equitable outcomes. Monitoring the administrative process, accessing and analyzing outcome data, and hearing directly from women about their experiences will require dedicated focus and capacity. Groundwork Ohio and bi3 will continue to advocate to ensure that every mom and baby have an equal opportunity for a healthy pregnancy, delivery, motherhood, infancy and young childhood.



Maternal and infant health in Ohio

Several existing policy efforts and contextual factors helped set the stage for the expansion of postpartum Medicaid coverage in the state. Below is a brief list of legislation and programs that accelerated Ohio's efforts:

- Ohio Senate Bill 332 to implement recommendations from the Ohio Commission on Infant Mortality included efforts to expand housing for pregnant women, identify best practices to reduce poor pregnancy outcomes and establish goals to improve prenatal care
- The Ohio Governor's Children's Initiative *Eliminating Racial Disparities in Infant Mortality Task Force* to create a statewide vision and strategy to address racial inequalities in birth outcomes
- The Ohio Department of Medicaid *Maternal and Infant Support Program* to improve racial disparities in infant and maternal outcomes, including the expansion of postpartum coverage for women with substance use disorders through a Medicaid 1115 Demonstration Waiver
- U.S. House of Representatives' Black Maternal Health Omnibus Act of 2021 (H.R. 959) to address disparities in maternal health among racial and ethnic groups, veterans and other populations with increased risk for poor outcomes



About bi3

bi3 is on a mission to transform health for all people in Greater Cincinnati by fueling innovation and health equity through grantmaking. bi3 leverages its strategic partnership with TriHealth to spark and scale new approaches to healthcare and partners with community-based organizations to fuel new solutions to deep-seated community health issues. bi3 is leading the way to a day when every person has a fair and just opportunity to be as healthy as possible; when a person's health can no longer be predicted by race, ethnicity, ability or zip code. bi3 is a philanthropic initiative created by Bethesda Inc. to drive innovation in healthcare and improve community health outcomes.



Learn more at bi3.org.

About GroundWork Ohio

Groundwork Ohio focuses on the time when children's experiences and environments most influence their health, development and life trajectory: from birth to age five. We work to ensure that every baby, toddler and young child in Ohio has the resources and opportunities for a strong start.



We advance public policy for young children because intervening early is the most effective and resource-efficient way to positively impact a person's life trajectory, making it the greatest return on investment of public money. We work directly with legislators to benefit young children. The policies we support are informed by research, data and evidence, and are influenced by a diversity of voices and perspectives of those who will be directly affected.

Learn more at groundworkohio.org.