

Optimizing Maternal Health in Pennsylvania



Summary

- Maternal health outcomes and infant wellness are a top priority for Pennsylvania lawmakers.¹
- Early and effective prenatal care has been shown to be the best predictor of health outcomes for women and infants.²
- Maternal and fetal health disparities exist for black women and vulnerable populations.³
- Barriers exist for early pregnancy care providing a window of opportunity for services between suspecting pregnancy and attending a first prenatal visit.⁴
- PPWC Pregnancy Medical Centers and Pregnancy Resource Centers address key personal and strategic factors and barriers to prenatal care. Pregnancy Centers supplement existing health systems to bridge disparities in early pregnancy and beyond.

How Pregnancy Medical Centers in PA Make an Impact

Mental Health

- Engaging with clients after delivery
- Group activities with other mothers to build community
- Acting as a hub for social support services and community referrals
- Providing goal-oriented support services to help guide women and families through pregnancy
- Trauma healing workshops
- Screening for mental health disorders, including thoughts of harming self or others
- Screening for intimate partner violence, abuse, and trafficking

- Supporting clients in reporting abuse and navigating legal proceedings

Physical Health

- Referrals to prenatal care providers
- Discussion of reproductive health and fertility
- Ultrasounds to identify healthy pregnancy
- Prenatal education and childbirth classes

Racial Disparities

- Building community relationships to engage with minority population

¹ <https://www.ncsl.org/health/state-approaches-to-ensuring-healthy-pregnancies-through-prenatal-care>

² Ibid.

³ <https://bmcpublihealth.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12889-018-5935-2>

⁴ <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC8488070/>

Supplementation in the Continuum of Care

Pre-natal care on average begins at 9.6 weeks. 38% of women reported that no appts were available, 28% report not having adequate finances for entry into care. 15% of women report that prenatal care was not available as early as desired. ⁵



This presents an opportunity for early intervention between suspecting pregnancy and attending the first prenatal care visit. Opportunities exist for early assessment, ultrasound exams, and services addressing barriers to care particularly among highly vulnerable groups. Early ultrasounds confirm critical information such as viability, pregnancy placement, and gestational age—steps that are crucial for ensuring a safe and healthy outcome for both mother and child.

Key factors impacting maternal health include lack of education, poor nutrition, smoking, hypertension, presence of some types of STDs⁶, depression⁷ and diabetes. Pregnancy centers offer various resources that address these specific risks.

Many centers also provide additional maternal healthcare services, including prenatal vitamins, case management, access to essential resources, obstetric referrals, and ongoing education on topics like parenting, nutrition, and birthing. These services support not just the immediate needs of our clients but also their long-term health and success. Some of the services provided may include: (Note: not all services are provided at all centers; each center looks to meet unique needs in their local community)

- Pregnancy testing
- Early ultrasound to identify ectopic pregnancy, fetal demise (miscarriage), and exact gestational age
- Screening for STDs
- Services that facilitate access to local medical and social services including referrals for Medicaid and WIC services
- Prenatal vitamins
- Advocacy to remove barriers to care (financial, language services, homelessness, etc.)
- Screening for overweight and hypertension
- Prenatal and Pregnancy education classes: First, Second and Third Trimester Expectations, Pregnancy Milestones, Emotions of Pregnancy, Bonding with Your Unborn Baby, Infant Expectations, Mommy Work, Fatherhood Classes, nutrition, exercise, smoking cessation, etc.
- Healthy Pregnancy services classes: Healthy Relationships, Self-Care for Moms, Taking Care of Yourself After Birth, Labor and Delivery, Postpartum Care
- Newborn Care education classes: Teething Time, Infant Accidents, Baby on the Move, Newborn Care, Understanding Your Infant, Breastfeeding, Pediatric CPR, SIDS
- Material Assistance

⁵ Ibid., pmc.ncbi

⁶ <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/33678095/>

⁷ <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/33167722/>

An Emerging Need

Best practices historically suggest 12 to 14 prenatal visits during pregnancy. But the prenatal care delivery guidelines have radically changed over the last 20 years. And more recently, after the covid epidemic, virtual visits and telehealth are now commonplace. In 2020, the number of recommended visits was reduced by ACOG for the first time since 1930. Care is largely described as “one size fits all” raising concerns that the content, scope, and quality of prenatal care may be lacking in some sectors.⁸

In Florida, a 2023 study explored factors that would encourage higher attendance at prenatal visits. According to that study, women expressed that these values impacted their likelihood to consistently engage in their care:

- Clinic Availability
- Screening and testing (ultrasound)
- Health Education
- Interpersonal Communication
- Care in their primary language⁹

These insights again strengthen the case for supplementation of care and partnership with Pennsylvania’s pregnancy medical centers and pregnancy resource centers. Most offer services at no or low cost, have higher availability, provide personalized education and one-to-one assessment of ongoing needs. Care goes far beyond early intervention to provide health education, childbirth and breastfeeding classes. Post partum “4th trimester” appointments assess for depression and other indications of vulnerability.

Pregnancy centers are often the first responder for those suspecting pregnancy. PPWC medical pregnancy centers are led by board certified physicians, staffed by RN and RDMS professionals and offer all or most services at no cost ever to patients. Serving in PA for over 50 years, these centers have filled a vital role as a partner to health services. **Consideration of ways to expand, measure, and fund these key supplemental services may be a crucial component toward improving health outcomes in Pennsylvania.**

Profile of PPWC Medical and Resource Centers in PA

- There are 87 centers with 161 locations throughout the commonwealth; these centers represent 78% of the 67 Counties in PA with a focus on areas with the greatest need.
- 74 of the centers provide focused medical care under the supervision of a licensed medical director physician.
- PPWC centers meet the unique needs of the local communities in which they operate with the goal of filling the gaps in critical care needs for pregnancy and parenting.
- Patients seeking our services deserve knowledge, support, and accurate information so that they can make informed decisions in a professional environment. **She matters and so does her health.**
- PPWC centers believe that all patients deserve to be treated with time, attention and dignity no matter what their choice.
- Low-income women who choose to parent deserve support.
- Our centers serve the most vulnerable and our services are irreplaceable in our local communities.
- Pregnancy Centers have raving fans as reflected in patient and client surveys.
- Being funded locally makes centers responsible to their communities and be fiscally responsible.
- Pregnancy Centers provide millions of dollars in necessary services that might otherwise become a financial burden of PA. Total estimated materials and services are valued at \$8,902,457 for PA (Pregnancy center state impact report – 2022 data).

⁸ <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC9745905/#sec5>

⁹ <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC10141877/>