

Northam Administration Releases Maternal Health Strategic Plan

Recommendations will help Virginia achieve the Governor's goal of eliminating the racial disparities in maternal health outcomes by 2025

RICHMOND—Governor Ralph Northam's Administration, in partnership with the Virginia Council on Women, today unveiled a statewide [Maternal Health Strategic Plan](#) to guide the Commonwealth in its ongoing work to eliminate the racial disparities in Virginia's maternal mortality rate by 2025, [a goal the Governor announced in June 2019](#).

In Virginia and nationally, the maternal mortality rate for Black women is over two times as high as white women, according to the Virginia Department of Health's Office of the Chief Medical Examiner. The plan was informed by a series of listening sessions across the Commonwealth organized by the Office of the Secretary of Health and Human Resources that brought together community organizations, local health care providers and hospital systems, elected officials, state agency leaders, and other stakeholders to hear from individuals with lived experience and discuss strategies to improve maternal and infant health.

"Our Administration remains fully committed to pursuing policies that ensure equitable access to health care for Black, Indigenous, and other women of color," **said Governor Northam**. "This plan is the culmination of more than a year of work with diverse stakeholders and provides a roadmap with actionable recommendations for creating the systemic change necessary to achieve our goal of eliminating racial disparities in maternal and infant health outcomes in Virginia by 2025."

During the 2020 General Assembly session, Governor Northam signed [House Bill 687](#), carried by Delegate Lashrecse Aird, which authorizes the Virginia Department of Health to develop a state-certified doula registry. Governor Northam directed the Department of Medical Assistance Services to design a Medicaid [community doula benefit](#) in his [2020 budget](#), which is currently being developed.. He also signed [House Bill 2111](#) and [House Bill 1950](#) and from the 2021 special legislative session, which direct the Virginia Department of Health to establish a Task Force on Maternal Health Data and Quality Measures and develop a plan for establishing a Fetal and Infant Mortality Review Team, respectively.

These critical pieces of legislation help pave the way for improved outcomes by enhancing data collection, addressing key barriers to high-quality maternal health care and illustrating the need to achieve the outcomes outlined in the maternal health strategic plan.

“It is necessary that we have collaboration across a variety of sectors to ensure that women in Virginia have choice and access to high quality care and services before, during, and after pregnancy,” **said Deputy Secretary of Health and Human Resources Vanessa Walker Harris, MD.** “We were intentional in ensuring that what we heard from pregnant and parenting persons and women with lived experiences was fully included in our recommendations.”

“The racial disparities in maternal health outcomes have gone unaddressed for far too long.” **said Delegate Lashrecse Aird.** “The impact of COVID-19 has increased the urgency even more to ensure that Black mothers and children have the best possible chance at a healthy life.”

The statewide Maternal Health Strategic Plan outlines six specific strategies and 21 recommendations to achieve the Governor’s goal and address the racial disparities in maternal health outcomes. The strategies focus on improvements in six areas, including insurance coverage, health care setting, criminal justice and child welfare response, community-based services, contraception, and data collection.

Recommendations include eliminating maternity care deserts by establishing a maternity workforce pipeline inclusive of people of color, ensuring behavioral health access through expanded use of telehealth, and improving access to wrap around supports such as safe, reliable, and affordable housing and transportation.

These recommendations build upon efforts the General Assembly, state agencies, community-based organizations, reproductive health advocates and hospital partners have undertaken to improve outcomes for all pregnant and parenting persons in Virginia.

“We are so thankful for the hard work that Virginia has undergone to truly listen to women—not just to hear them but to take action that supports improving maternal health outcomes,” **said Chair of the Virginia Council on Women Ashley Reynolds Marshall, JD.** “We are committed to ensuring that all women of the Commonwealth have a voice, and that voice is heard.”

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