

# Disparities in Maternal Healthcare

Maternal healthcare is a pivotal aspect of public health, crucial for the well-being of mothers and their children. The disparities in maternal healthcare access and outcomes are particularly pronounced in Central Florida, especially among minority and low-income populations. These disparities manifest in various dimensions, including prenatal care quality, maternal and infant mortality rates, and mental health support.

## Prenatal Care Quality

- Hispanic and African American women are less likely to receive early and consistent prenatal care compared to other populations of women. Factors contributing to this include language barriers, cultural differences, and lack of health insurance coverage in predominantly minority communities. Twenty-three percent (23%) of Florida's women received inadequate prenatal care, defined as care beginning in the fifth month or later or less than 50% of the appropriate number of visits for the infant's gestational age. (March of Dimes, [March of Dimes Report Card: Florida](#), 2024.)
- First trimester prenatal care decreased across Lake, Orange, Osceola, and Seminole Counties from 2019-2022. Meanwhile, low birth weight has increased in all these counties. (Central Florida Collaborative, [2025 Community Health Needs Assessment by the Central Florida Collaborative](#), January 20, 2024.)
- Poverty and lack of insurance are significant barriers to accessing maternal healthcare. In Florida, 20% of women of childbearing age are uninsured, and in areas like Orlando, the lack of health insurance is linked to higher rates of maternal mortality. Florida ranks 51<sup>st</sup> out of 51 states for lack of prenatal care. (The Commonwealth Fund, [2024 State Scorecard on Women's Reproductive Care: Florida](#), 2024.)

## Maternal and Infant Mortality Rates

- Florida ranks as one of the worst states for maternal mortality, and the United States continues to have the highest rates of maternal deaths among developed nations. Black women are three to four times more likely to die during pregnancy or the year after. And of those deaths, 80% are preventable. (AdventHealth, ['Fourth Trimester' Program takes aim at health disparities affecting Black mothers](#), February 14, 2025.)
- Chronic conditions related to poor health outcomes, like pre-pregnancy obesity, hypertension, and diabetes, have increased significantly since 2015 and are most common among women living in maternity care deserts. These conditions have a disproportionate impact on Black and Indigenous/Native American birthing people in the United States. Although access to adequate monitoring during pregnancy and after delivery can mitigate negative outcomes, "maternity care deserts" exist in America and in Central Florida (largely in Hardee, Glades, and Hendry County) where individuals lack essential maternity care services providing prenatal care and safe delivery options. Approximately 11% of Floridians reside more than a 30-minute drive from a birthing hospital, increasing the risk of adverse outcomes for pregnant individuals and newborns. (March of Dimes, [Nowhere to Go: Maternity Care Deserts Across the US](#), 2024.)

## Disparities in Maternal Healthcare

- Although the infant mortality rate in Florida decreased in the last decade to 6% of every 1,000 live births, the infant mortality rate among babies born to Black birthing people is 1.8x the state rate (or 10.9% of 1000 live births). (March of Dimes, [March of Dimes Report Card: Florida](#), 2024.)

### Mental Health Support

- Mental health conditions such as postpartum depression are underdiagnosed in Central Florida, partly due to cultural stigma and lack of awareness among healthcare providers and patients. The CDC reports that up to 20% of pregnant women in the U.S. experience a mental health disorder, yet less than half receive treatment. Screening and identification of postpartum mental health conditions is particularly important, given they are the leading underlying causes of pregnancy-related death. (March of Dimes, [Nowhere to Go: Maternity Care Deserts Across the US](#), 2024.)

The disparities in maternal healthcare in Central Florida are complex and multifaceted, requiring a comprehensive approach that addresses ethnic, socioeconomic, and mental health issues. Implementing policies that improve access to prenatal care, cultural competency training, mental health programs, and additional research with supporting data can lead to significant improvements in maternal health outcomes and reduce the healthcare disparities currently experienced by many women in Central Florida.