

**Director John B. McCarthy**  
**Infant Mortality Commission Update**  
**Wednesday, August 26, 2015**

Good morning Chairwoman Jones and members of the commission. I have been asked to come before you this morning to offer an update on Ohio Medicaid's efforts in the area of infant mortality.

The first step toward addressing Ohio's alarming infant mortality rate is understanding the problem and contributing factors:

- Health care accounts for only 10% of an individual's overall health;
- Preterm births are the leading cause of infant death at 47%. Another 15% are attributable to sleep-related deaths and 14% to birth defects. Other causes include violence and infections.
- Ohio currently ranks 45<sup>th</sup> nationally in infant mortality with an average of 7.4 deaths per thousand live births. For African American infants Ohio has an average of 13.8 deaths per thousand live births; and
- Akron contains a zip code with the highest infant mortality level in the United States.

In light of this information, Ohio Medicaid has partnered with its sister state agencies, community organizations, and other stakeholders to consider innovative ways to significantly improve birth outcomes in Ohio.

Through our budget process and prior initiatives we have focused on these key priorities to ensure a healthy pregnancy and first year of life for all Ohio mothers and their babies:

- Focus on evidence-based strategies to reduce maternal smoking;
- Eliminate payments for medically unnecessary scheduled deliveries;
- Consider infant mortality HEDIS measures when auto enrolling into Managed Care;
- Improve the administration of Progesterone for at-risk mothers; and
- Coordinate care for women in high risk neighborhoods.

We allocated \$13.4 million annually in the current budget to be used in the nine counties that contain the highest infant mortality rates among African American populations. Ohio Medicaid, in collaboration with its managed care plans and the respective state legislators, will work with community members to determine how we assist the existing infrastructure and efforts in place to help the individual community overcome the specific obstacles related to combating infant mortality.

This work began three weeks ago in Summit County as ODM facilitated a kick-off meeting with local stakeholders and the managed care plans. The meeting focused on establishing an open dialogue to identify innovative approaches to improving the overall health system and birth outcomes. In the coming months, we plan to continue this collaborative effort in Cuyahoga, Stark, Mahoning, Franklin,

Montgomery, Butler, Hamilton, and Lucas counties. It is our goal to bring these communities together to start what will be an ongoing conversation and partnership, provide financial and administrative support, and create momentum moving forward.