Infant Vitality
ADVOCACY DAY
September 30, 2025

Lighting the Way to One

September is National Infant Mortality Awareness Month

Infant mortality, or death in children under the age of one, is often referred to as a key indicator of a community's health and well-being and a marker for social progress. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC),[1] **Ohio's infant mortality rate (IMR) was 7.16 deaths per 1,000 live births in 2023, the fifth highest rate in the country,** exceeded only by Alaska, Alabama, Arkansas and Mississippi. There are some cities and neighborhoods within the state with rates four times higher than the state IMR. **Nearly 1 in 140 Ohio babies do not live to see their first birthday. For Black infants, that number is about 1 in 73.**

Poverty is a significant risk factor for infant mortality and contributes to increased stress and poor health outcomes for families. In 2023, Ohio's poverty was 13.3%,[2] the 15th highest in the country. Since 2007, Ohio's poverty rate has consistently ranked higher than the national average. Many counties have even higher poverty rates, including Cuyahoga (15.7%), Muskingum (19.5%), and Richland (14.0%).

Babies have no voice, yet they are the future of our state and filled with potential. In fact, from birth to age three, babies gain more than a million neural connections every second. By focusing on mortality and not the vitality of our families, we were focusing too much on the problem and not the solutions. Collectively, we have a responsibility to lift up the voices of families and invest in solutions that are working to ensure every baby celebrates their first birthday.

Our Shared Mission

Ensure all pregnant and parenting Ohio families have what they need to thrive by:

1. **Recognizing stress from poverty impacts birth outcomes**
2. **Expanding awareness and capacity for maternal mental health**
3. **Ensuring economic stability for Ohio's babies and their families**

You can help light the way to one for more babies.

Maternal Mental Health

Ohio needs more mental health providers and better reimbursement systems to support the mental health of mothers.

Economic Stability

Pending cuts to Medicaid, SNAP and other federal support programs will disproportionately impact Ohio families who are already struggling.

These issues have a direct impact on the health of babies and families. Read on for more information about these challenges and ways you can advocate for infant vitality in Ohio. >>

MATERNAL MENTAL HEALTH

The challenge:

About one in eight new mothers experience postpartum depression. It's widely believed to be much more common than the data indicates due to underreporting out of fear or lack of awareness.[3] **Left untreated, maternal mental health challenges cost the U.S. $14 billion or $32,000 per mother and infant each year.** Yet for every $1 spent on mental health treatment, there is an average return of $4 in improved health and productivity.[4]

Alarmingly, Ohio is experiencing a behavioral health workforce shortage, with 65 of 88 counties—most of them rural—being considered Health Professional Shortage areas.[5] The challenge is compounded by the fact that mental health services are reimbursed at lower rates than primary care. Providers are making difficult decisions as to whether they offer mental health care.

What you can do:

- **Advocate for House Concurrent Resolution 12 (HCR12), recognizing the Importance of Perinatal Mental Health.** This bill would acknowledge perinatal mental health challenges and raise awareness. HCR12 was introduced and referred to the House Health Committee, but has not yet received a hearing.
- **Improve and expand capacity for mental health care:** Create simplified universal mental health reimbursement models akin to primary care for all providers, private and public, and hold payors accountable to reimbursement timelines.

  Expand reimbursement through the Ohio Department of Medicaid (ODM) to cover additional services, such as Community Health Worker (CHW) programs, that provide perinatal care and support. Because ODM only recognizes the Pathways HUB for CHW care reimbursement, most programs rely on grants to provide these services. Expanding Medicaid reimbursement could both reduce public investment and provide better wrap-around services that improve mental health.

ECONOMIC STABILITY

The challenge:

One in four Ohioans–or a total of 3 million–have health coverage through Medicaid and about 1.5 million Ohioans received SNAP benefits in May 2025.[6] Rural southeast Ohioans represent the highest percentage of SNAP users across the state. Ohio must take steps to protect benefits and cost sharing and invest in county JFS systems to support our most vulnerable families and children.

What you can do:

- **Protect Ohio families from the impact of federal cuts to Medicaid and SNAP.** The Center for Community Solutions estimates that within one year of implementation of the federal cuts, "Ohio stands to lose over $5.1 billion in total Medicaid funding. Over a 10-year period, that figure swells to more than $53.3 billion in funding reductions."[7] Children and pregnant people in households where a parent may lose coverage are among those most likely to be impacted.

  Because of new SNAP cuts and error rate requirements in HB1, Ohio will have to absorb about 10% of the state's SNAP program costs, or more than $315 million. "In 2024, Ohio had an error rate of 9%, which is the measure of its eligibility and benefit determinations. Any state with an error rate higher than 6% will have to shoulder anywhere from 5% to 15% of benefit costs under the bill."[8]
- **Advocate for a living wage.** The median household income in the state of Ohio is nearly $68,000,[9] however, according to the Living Wage Calculator,[10] the necessary household income for a family of four with two working adults is $110,000—and even higher in many Ohio counties, including in Franklin ($118,169), Hamilton ($112,590), and Hancock ($111,291).

  Ohio families need higher wages in order to thrive: $26.51 per hour for two working adults in a four-person household, more than double Ohio's minimum wage of $10.70.

References + More Information

1 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), CDC Wonder (https://wonder.cdc.gov/)

2 https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs

3 https://www.postpartumdepression.org/resources/statistics/

4 Ohio Council of Behavioral Health and Family Service Providers https://www.theohiocouncil.org/assets/BreakingPoint/TheOhioCouncil_Whitepaper_BreakingPoint.pdf

5 https://mmhmap.com/

6 Ohio Department of Jobs and Family Services (JFS), https://data.ohio.gov/wps/portal/gov/data/view/snap-population-metrics

7 https://www.communitysolutions.com/resources/ohio-medicaid-financial-impacts-of-house-resolution-1

8 https://www.statenews.org/government-politics/2025-07-07/federal-cuts-to-snap-mean-ohio-will-have-to-bear-some-benefit-costs-for-the-first-time

9 https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs

10 https://livingwage.mit.edu/states/39.