

Governor Phil Murphy

New Jersey First Lady Tammy Murphy Unveils Groundbreaking Plan to Eliminate Racial Disparities in New Jersey's Maternal and Infant Mortality

01/25/2021

This first-of-its-kind strategy will make New Jersey the safest and most equitable place in the nation to deliver and raise a baby

Both the report and policy framework have been over a year in the making and represent the collaboration of over 100 experts and leaders in maternal mortality and equity

TRENTON – Today, First Lady Tammy Murphy and national public health expert Dr. Vijaya Hogan unveiled the Nurture NJ Maternal and Infant Health Plan (<https://nurturenj.nj.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/20210120-Nurture-NJ-Strategic-Plan.pdf>) – a strategy to reduce New Jersey's high rates of maternal and infant mortality and eliminate the racial disparities responsible for these deaths. The strategic plan is the latest element of the First Lady's Nurture NJ initiative, which aims to make New Jersey the safest and most equitable place in the nation to deliver and raise a baby. Currently, Black mothers in the state are seven times more likely than white mothers to die from pregnancy-related complications. In addition, Black babies in New Jersey are three times more likely than white babies to die before their first birthdays. The Nurture NJ Maternal and Infant Health Strategic Plan includes over 70 specific, actionable recommendations for maternal health stakeholders across all sectors. Funded by The Nicholson Foundation and the Community Health Acceleration Partnership, the plan will position New Jersey as a national leader in the fight for maternal health equity.

The plan aims to reduce maternal mortality by 50 percent over five years and eliminate racial disparities in birth outcomes. To do so, the plan seeks to: (1) ensure all women are healthy and have access to care before pregnancy; (2) build a safe, high quality equitable system of care for all women prenatally through postpartum care; and (3) ensure supportive community environments during every other part of a woman's life so that the conditions and opportunities for health are always available.

"Fully achieving the goals of Nurture NJ requires transformative change to a system that has historically and disproportionately failed Black women," **said First Lady Tammy Murphy**. "The Nurture NJ Maternal and Infant Health Strategic Plan provides the blueprint for necessary collaboration, partnership, and communication among government, private stakeholders, nonprofits and impacted communities and will ensure every New Jersey mother and baby gets off to a healthy start."

The Nurture NJ Maternal and Infant Health Strategic Plan is the culmination of over a year of in-person and virtual meetings with over 100 critical stakeholders, including national public health experts, New Jersey state departments and agencies, health systems, physicians, doulas, community organizations, and mothers and families. The team drew on extensive maternal health research and data to examine the structural barriers and systemic racism that contributes to the maternal and infant health crisis.

"The Nurture NJ strategic plan is designed to build a complete ecosystem that supports the health and well-being of mothers and infants," **said Dr. Vijaya Hogan, independent consultant, Adjunct Professor in the Department of Maternal and Child Health, Gillings School of Public Health, UNC-CH and lead author of the Nurture NJ plan**. "The desire for transformative change was shared in every stakeholder discussion across New Jersey and the nation. This plan is about changing health outcomes through changing the way society treats women of color in all aspects of their lives."

To begin implementation, the report includes a detailed Year-One Playbook outlining the immediate, actionable recommendations that lay the groundwork for systemic change. The plan also includes implementation tools for various stakeholder groups in New Jersey, including business leaders, state agencies, health and social service providers, and community groups. Stakeholders are invited to commit to achieving these goals and working together across sectors to create a better New Jersey for all mothers and babies. The team, which includes 11 national consultants, has already begun working with stakeholders to ensure the feasibility of implementing the recommended action steps.

Formally launched as Nurture NJ on Maternal Health Awareness Day, January 23, 2019, the issue of maternal and infant health has been a focal point of the First Lady since the inception of the Murphy Administration in 2018.

"This plan is not just a 'quick fix' – it's a long-term strategy that will result in the systemic change needed to reach our goal of making New Jersey the safest and most equitable place in the nation to give birth and raise a baby," **said Lt. Governor Sheila Oliver, who serves as Commissioner of the Department of Community Affairs**. "By focusing on equity, we can more effectively transform a system that has been failing New Jersey's women of color for too long."

"Nationally and in New Jersey, maternal and infant mortality are among the worst disparities that Black women experience," **said Congresswoman Bonnie Watson Coleman**. "We are bombarded by stories that prove this issue crosses socioeconomic boundaries, and despite decades of awareness, we've struggled to move the needle. It will take coordinated effort at every level to change these statistics, and I am grateful that the First Lady continues to use her platform and her power to be part of those efforts. This is another tremendous opportunity for our state to set the example for others to follow, and I will continue to ensure the federal government does its part to give every mother and infant a safe and healthy start."

"I applaud the First Lady's Nurture NJ Strategic Plan and am grateful for her leadership on this important issue," **said Congressman Frank Pallone**. "We must work together to improve the health outcomes for new and expecting mothers and their children. As Chairman of the Energy and Commerce Committee, I've worked to pass legislation out of my Committee to address maternal mortality and morbidity and to reduce health care disparities. I look forward to continuing to work in Congress and with First Lady Murphy to improve health outcomes and ensure that new mothers and their children have access to the care they need."

"The plan introduced today is a major step forward in our state's ongoing efforts to improve the maternal health outcomes of New Jersey mothers. With input from experts, advocates and the very families directly affected by this issue, the Nurture NJ Maternal and Infant Health Strategic Plan will undoubtedly lead to significantly positive change on behalf of the mothers and newborns in our state. While our work is far from over, we are proud to support a plan that will help get us closer to our goal of making New Jersey a safe, reliable place to start and grow a family," **said Assemblymembers Shavonda Sumter, Verlina Reynolds-Jackson, and Herb Conaway.**

"It is clear that maternal health care needs to be improved, especially for women and families who don't have equal access to medical services," **said Senator Nellie Pou.** "We need a game plan that strives to make New Jersey a model for maternal care that is safe and available. This can make a real difference in the good health of infants, their mothers and the families for their entire lives. I applaud the work of everyone who played an active role in putting this plan together."

"All of us have a role to play in addressing inequities in maternal and infant mortality in New Jersey, and the development of the Nurture NJ strategic plan is a great example of the private and public sectors coming together to make a positive difference," **said Dr. Kimberly Boller, Chief Strategy and Evaluation Officer at The Nicholson Foundation.** "We look forward to continuing this multi-sector collaboration to ensure the implementation of these recommendations, guided by science and the experience of mothers and their communities."

"The Community Health Acceleration Partnership is honored to be a part of the First Lady's collaborative approach to addressing health injustice and improving outcomes for all birthing people in the state," **said Wendy McWeeny, Director of US Initiatives, Community Health Acceleration Partnership.** "The Nurture NJ strategic plan will ensure a coordinated response, centered in communities that can serve as a model for all states."

"The NAACP NJ State Conference applauds and stands with First Lady, Tammy Murphy, and the Nurture NJ Collaborative as it addresses this Black Maternal and Infant Crisis that affects many regardless to access or money," **said Vivian M. J. Darkes, NAACP NJ State Secretary and Health Chair.** "It is time that we acknowledge this issue and declare racism the social emergency that it is. We must join this collaborative in its quest to build racial equity infrastructure and capacity while engaging trusted voices within the communities, including people of color in the overall structure from the top to the bottom."

"Women of color experience some of the highest rates of health inequalities due to societal, economic and environmental factors that impact their health," **said Dr. Rahul Gupta, Chief Medical Officer and Senior Vice President, March of Dimes.** "The Nurture NJ Strategic Plan will go a long way in tackling these social determinants of health, as well as the structural and systemic inequities that we see in our health care system. We're honored to support this transformative and innovative approach to improving maternal health outcomes which has the potential to serve as a national model."

"Initiatives like Nurture NJ provide a roadmap that keeps women at the center of solutions," **said Mary-Ann Etiebet, Executive Director, Merck for Mothers.** "By expanding how quality care can be provided and integrating evidence-based strategies to reach everyone, we can make our maternal health systems more resilient, now and in the future."

"The maternal death rate for Black women in NJ is seven times that of white women," **Dr. Nastassia Davis, Founder/Executive Director, Perinatal Health Equity Foundation.** "Black women in New Jersey are in a state of crisis. Just this December we lost a Black mother named Jenayha Nulums to a post birth hemorrhage which was likely preventable. The Nurture NJ plan will complement the Black Mamas Matter Alliance's plan as they both provide solid framework of the necessary steps to move the needle forward. We have talked about these statistics long enough, it is time to put our words into actions."

"I share my story so that other young Black mothers know that their voices deserve to be heard and when you think something is wrong, don't let anyone silence you," **said Ajanee McConnell.**

To learn more about Nurture NJ, visit [NurtureNJ.nj.gov](https://nurturenj.nj.gov) (<https://nurturenj.nj.gov>).

Follow Nurture NJ and First Lady Tammy Murphy on Twitter (@FirstLadyNJ), Facebook (@FirstLadyNJ), and Instagram (@firstladynewjersey).

The Nicholson Foundation is a private foundation in New Jersey dedicated to improving the health and well-being of vulnerable populations in the state.

The Community Health Acceleration Partnership works to build stronger and more effective community health systems through catalytic investments and strategic engagement.

Governor Phil Murphy

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