

Governor Phil Murphy

First Lady Tammy Murphy Announces Partnership to Develop Statewide Strategic Plan to Reduce New Jersey's Mortality Rate by Fifty Percent and Eliminate Racial Disparities in Birth Outcomes

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TRENTON – On Maternal Health Awareness Day, First Lady Tammy Murphy today announced the partnership between the Murphy Administration, the Nicholson Foundation, and the Community Health Acceleration Partnership to develop a comprehensive, statewide maternal and infant health strategic plan. The strategic plan, which will build on the Administration's progress over the past two years, will aim to reduce New Jersey's maternal mortality rate by fifty percent and eliminate racial disparities in birth outcomes. The plan will be part of the First Lady's Nurture NJ initiative, which is a statewide awareness campaign committed to reducing infant and maternal mortality and morbidity and ensuring equitable maternal and infant care among women and children of all ethnicities and races.

"In order to improve health outcomes for New Jersey's mothers and babies, we must continue to work at repairing the centuries of imbedded, institutional racism that has led to disparities in maternal and infant health," said **First Lady Murphy**. "As we do this, we are simultaneously working on the factors that contribute to the disparity, including access to healthcare, housing, transportation, nutritious food, quality childcare, workforce development, education, and more. Our comprehensive and innovative strategic plan will incorporate national best practices for improving these factors and identify the best plan to make New Jersey the safest place in the country to give birth."

To reduce maternal mortality by fifty percent and eliminate racial disparities in birth outcomes, the plan will integrate community engagement and evidence-based strategies. The strategic plan will include a statewide assessment of existing infrastructure to support improvements in maternal and infant health. The plan will examine community investments, clinical and social factors, private sector engagement, and policy development. Work will be further informed by talking directly to women across the state; interviewing and engaging the Administration's 18 collaborating agencies; working with leading state health providers; and talking to a range of community-based organizations. In parallel, the plan will incorporate national best practices for improving maternal and infant health and eliminating disparities, in order to identify areas where state activities could better align with scientific evidence. To set up Nurture NJ for long-term success, the comprehensive plan will include specific, actionable recommendations for all stakeholders, and a concrete implementation plan for ensuring equity for mothers, babies, and their families.

In addition to First Lady Murphy and leadership from the Murphy Administration, the Nurture NJ strategic planning team will be led by Dr. Vijaya Hogan, a perinatal epidemiologist and Clinical Associate Professor at the Gillings School of Global Public Health at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, and supported by



Dr. Debra Bingham, an expert in perinatal quality improvement, Elizabeth Lee, a public health policy consultant, and other experts. The strategic planning team collectively holds over 125 years of experience and represents the great diversity of thought that is needed to address New Jersey's maternal and infant health crisis.

"I am so grateful to First Lady Murphy and this administration for making this issue a priority and continuing to push forward on it. We have to do more to ensure infants and mothers are healthy and thriving in New Jersey and across the country," **said Congresswoman Bonnie Watson Coleman, a cofounder of the Congressional Caucus on Black Women and Girls.** "We are losing mothers in ways that could be prevented with proper care. We are losing Black mothers and Black infants at astonishing and unacceptably disparate rates. This is an issue that's critically important for me, and one that I will continue to work on with our partners in New Jersey and at the federal level."

"As part of the Administration's campaign to combat the unacceptable racial disparities in maternal and infant health outcomes in New Jersey," **said Human Services Commissioner Carole Johnson.** "The Murphy Administration is making changes to Medicaid to better support pregnant women and infants including creating new Medicaid doula services benefits and new group prenatal or 'centering' prenatal benefits, and making new investments in quality, affordable child care. The Department welcomes the opportunity to advance these and other policy changes through the whole-of-government approach of the First Lady's Nurture NJ initiative and the development of the statewide plan on maternal and infant health. Supporting the First Lady's Nurture NJ campaign and eliminating disparities in maternal and infant health outcomes includes making sure families have access to quality, affordable health care and child care. The Murphy Administration is making health care and child care priorities because they are critical to child development and to families' economic development. We're committed to using all available tools to best help women and children get the best health outcomes and live healthy lives."

"The Department of Health is committed to creating sustainable change to improve outcomes for all of the women in New Jersey," **said New Jersey Department of Health Commissioner Judith Persichilli.** "Working with our partners, we are developing strategies for healthcare quality improvement, increasing access to services for underserved communities and working to make our health care system more responsive to the needs of women."

"My team is excited to contribute to the First Lady's efforts to improve maternal and infant health, and collaborate with the many Commissioners, advocates, providers and communities who have laid a foundation for success in New Jersey," **said Dr. Vajaya Hogan.** "Tammy Murphy has set a high bar for NJ and for other states to follow and I look forward to working to produce an innovative, equity-based strategic plan that we hope will make NJ the safest place for all women to give birth."

"The Nicholson Foundation is committed to working with the Office of the First Lady and the Community Health Acceleration Project to eliminate disparities in maternal and infant mortality," **said Dr. Kimberly Boller, Chief Strategy and Evaluation Officer at The Nicholson Foundation.** "We are thrilled Dr. Vijaya Hogan and her team are collaborating with all of us to assess existing systems and develop an integrated, cross-sector Nurture NJ plan."

"The Community Health Acceleration Partnership and The Nicholson Foundation are committed to working with the Office of the First Lady to eliminate disparities in maternal and infant mortality," **said Wendy McWeeny, Director of US Initiatives at the Community Health Acceleration Partnership.** "We are thrilled Dr. Vijaya Hogan and her team are collaborating with all of us to assess existing systems and develop an integrated, cross-sector Nurture NJ plan. This plan will acknowledge where women are dying—not just in hospitals but in their homes and communities, and will highlight the need for community-based, social support interventions. When we value something, we have a plan for it: the Nurture NJ strategic plan will ensure that NJ is a place where women don't just survive childbirth, but where women thrive in motherhood."

"The mortality numbers for pregnant women in New Jersey were shameful to say the least. Compacting that

with the fact that more black women do not survive pregnancy and have complications than any other group of women in the State and around the country," **said Assemblywoman Shavonda Sumter**. "Our work in this last legislative session put this issue at the forefront of our policy initiative as it should be. It was very clear that there was a serious problem and we had to find out why. We are not done. To effectively help women, we need more answers."

"It is imperative we continue to bring attention to African-American and Caucasian disparities in the State's maternal mortality rate. We will continue to do more to help improve the numbers," **said Assemblywoman Verlina Reynolds-Jackson**. "All New Jersey women deserve a safe and healthy pregnancy and birth for themselves and their child."

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