

Governor Phil Murphy

First Lady Tammy Murphy Hosts 8th Annual Nurture NJ Leadership Summit, Focusing on Building Trust and Community

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Summit Gathered Nearly 800 Experts and Advocates and Featured Dynamic Speakers, Including Governor-Elect Mikie Sherrill

TRENTON – First Lady Tammy Murphy today hosted her 8th and final Nurture NJ Leadership Summit in East Brunswick. The event convened nearly 800 in-person participants who engaged in a day full of discussion on fostering a more collaborative and responsive approach to maternal health by breaking down silos and uplifting the voices of mothers, families, and caregivers to help shape solutions to the maternal health crisis.

The Summit featured several dynamic speakers, and Governor-elect Mikie Sherrill provided opening remarks. Attendees included national experts in maternal and infant health care, doulas, health care providers, policymakers, activists, nonprofit leaders, moms and more, all coming together to share unique insights and work toward concrete solutions to sustain the progress of the Nurture NJ initiative. All attendees were encouraged to actively contribute ideas, provide feedback and collaborate on new strategies for improving care and reducing health disparities.

“It has been the honor of my lifetime to serve New Jersey’s moms and babies. Over the past eight years, Nurture NJ has grown from an idea to a statewide movement with thousands of partners, and has fostered collaboration, advanced policy changes, and transformed our state into a leader in maternal and infant health care,” **said First Lady Tammy Murphy**. “While our work is far from over, I have tremendous hope for the future, and I am more certain than ever that what we have built will make New Jersey the safest and most equitable state in the nation to deliver and raise a baby.”

“For too long, Black mothers across New Jersey have been unable to access quality, affordable maternal health care. That’s unacceptable. I applaud the work of programs like Nurture NJ that have worked to drive down the maternal mortality rate, and I’m grateful for First Lady Murphy’s continued focus on this important issue,” **said Governor-elect Mikie Sherrill**. “As governor, I look forward to strengthening Nurture NJ and the Maternal and Infant Health Innovation Authority while investing in a culturally competent healthcare workforce, including doulas and midwives.”

Since the inaugural summit in 2018, the Nurture NJ Leadership Summit has played a key role in informing the statewide Nurture NJ initiative, launched by First Lady Tammy Murphy to address the State’s maternal and infant health crisis. Since Nurture NJ’s inception, New Jersey has made significant progress in maternal and infant health care and outcomes including: seeing over 70 pieces of maternal and infant health legislation signed by Governor Murphy; starting or completing over half of the Nurture NJ Strategic Plan recommendations; establishing the

Maternal and Infant Health Innovation Authority, tasked with overseeing the New Jersey Maternal and Infant Health Innovation Center based in Trenton, [which broke ground in July 2025 \(http://nj.gov/governor/news/news/562025/approved/20250722a.shtml\)](http://nj.gov/governor/news/news/562025/approved/20250722a.shtml), and serving as the arm of government that continues the vital work of Nurture NJ past the Murphy Administration; and launching Family Connects NJ, the most robust-in-the-nation universal nurse home visitation program to ensure that every new parent is visited by a nurse in their home for free within two weeks after bringing home a new baby. Through these groundbreaking policies and programs, New Jersey has become a national leader in the fight against the maternal and infant health crisis.

According to

[America's Health Rankings latest report \(https://www.americashealthrankings.org/learn/reports/2025-health-of-women-and-children-report\)](https://www.americashealthrankings.org/learn/reports/2025-health-of-women-and-children-report)

, New Jersey has improved its ranking for maternal mortality from 47th to 25th. Rutgers School of Public Health has been leading an evaluation on Nurture NJ and has released a series of briefs that illustrate the impact and importance of the initiative's work in areas such as

[decreased low-risk Cesarean birth rates \(https://sites.rutgers.edu/nurture-nj/wp-content/uploads/sites/1335/2025/06/Policy-Brief-Progress-in-Reducing-Low-Risk-Cesarean-Birth-Rate-in-NJ.pdf\)](https://sites.rutgers.edu/nurture-nj/wp-content/uploads/sites/1335/2025/06/Policy-Brief-Progress-in-Reducing-Low-Risk-Cesarean-Birth-Rate-in-NJ.pdf)

, [increased utilization of family leave benefits \(https://sites.rutgers.edu/nurture-nj/wp-content/uploads/sites/1335/2024/12/Rutgers-NJSP-20241028-Nurture-NJ-Paid-Leave-Policy-Brief_FINAL.pdf\)](https://sites.rutgers.edu/nurture-nj/wp-content/uploads/sites/1335/2024/12/Rutgers-NJSP-20241028-Nurture-NJ-Paid-Leave-Policy-Brief_FINAL.pdf)

, and more.

The Summit included expert-led conversations and collaborative group breakout sessions, moderated by Barbara George Johnson, Chair of the Maternal Infant Health Innovation Authority Board. The Summit's keynote was delivered by Latham Thomas, founder of Mama Glow & Mama Glow Foundation.

"In all of the communities we have served, I've witnessed the same truth: when we uplift mothers, we uplift generations. Here in New Jersey, First Lady Tammy Murphy's vision for Nurture NJ is proof of what becomes possible when we center care, connection, and collective responsibility. This Summit is not just a gathering—it's a reminder that transformative change happens when community wisdom leads the way," **said Latham Thomas, Founder, Mama Glow & the Mama Glow Foundation.** "As we come together for the final time in 2025, we have the opportunity to deepen trust, dismantle silos, and design a maternal health system rooted in dignity, equity, and love. I'm honored to stand with this powerful movement, to serve as this year's keynote speaker as we chart a future where every mother, baby, and family can truly thrive."

The first panel, titled "Listening to Families: Centering Community in Maternal Health Equity," was moderated by NJMIHIA President and CEO, Lisa Asare. Panelists included Dr. Ndidiamaka Amutah-Onukagha, Julia A. Okoro Professor of Black Maternal Health, Department of Public Health and Community Medicine, Tufts University School of Medicine; Sinsi Hernández-Cancio, JD, Senior Fellow, National Partnership for Women & Families; and Jaye Wilson, President & CEO, Melinated Moms.

"I commend the First Lady for bringing maternal and infant health disparities to the forefront and creating a space for important conversations about this issue at the highest levels of state government. Nurture NJ has laid a critical foundation for the future of New Jersey's maternal and infant health landscape, and NJMIHIA is ready for the challenge of continuing this important work," **said Lisa Asare, President and CEO of NJMIHIA.** "It is an incredible honor to be trusted with the legacy of what has been built over the past eight years. This work is not done, and it will

not be done until every mother in New Jersey can access the high-quality prenatal and postnatal care they deserve. I look forward to collaborating with our partners, our community leaders, and – most importantly – our state’s moms and babies to bring this vision forward.”

“Improving maternal and infant health outcomes requires more than research and policy, it requires deep partnership with the communities most impacted. True progress happens when we center lived experience, equity, and collective action. I am honored to stand alongside leaders who are united in this urgent work to ensure every birthing person and every baby has the opportunity to thrive,” **said Dr. Ndidiamaka Amutah-Onukagha, Julia A. Okoro Professor of Black Maternal Health, Department of Public Health and Community Medicine, Tufts University School of Medicine.** “At the Tufts University Center for Black Maternal Health and Reproductive Justice, our work is grounded in the voices and experiences of Black birthing people, and in the belief that sustainable change must be built with community, not just for it. The Nurture NJ Leadership Summit embodies that principle, bringing together leaders who are truly united for change and centered in community to improve outcomes for families across New Jersey and beyond.”

“The US is the most dangerous wealthy country in the world for giving birth. We know how to fix this. The National Partnership for Women & Families has long advocated for policy and practice solutions to our nation’s deplorable maternal health crisis that center on what mothers and communities themselves say they need,” **said Sinsi Hernández-Cancio, JD, Senior Fellow, National Partnership for Women & Families.** “From our Listening to Mothers national survey to our work to transform the maternal healthcare system, we know we can only succeed by solving for the obstacles and priorities of birthing families, especially from Black, Native, and communities of color.”

“As an advocate for maternal and infant health, I’m honored to join First Lady Tammy Murphy at the 2025 Nurture NJ Leadership Summit. The growth of Melinated Moms over the last 8 years has aligned with creating opportunities for moms to have the support they need to thrive in their motherhood, and not just survive it. The impact of our work is centered in Community - with a capital C - because the Community is the primary stakeholder in changing quantitative measures into qualitative outcomes,” **said Jaye Wilson, President & CEO, Melinated Moms.** “We are committed to continuing to dismantle systemic barriers and uplifting moms of color—with compassion, education, and collective action—to ensure every mother and baby thrives; no matter what.

The event’s second panel, titled “From Local to Global: Building Partnerships that Strengthen New Jersey Families,” was moderated by the First Lady. Panelists included Kenn L. Harris, Co-Founder and CEO, The League of Voices for Mothers, Babies, Fathers and Families; Christy Turlington Burns, Founder & President, Every Mother Counts; and Shakira Williams-Linzey, Director, Maternal and Infant Health Initiatives, March of Dimes.

“Improving maternal and infant outcomes requires that we strengthen every part of the family system, which includes fathers. Father inclusion is one of the most powerful yet underutilized levers in maternal and infant health,” **said Kenn L. Harris, Co-Founder and CEO, The League of Voices for Mothers, Babies, Fathers and Families.** “I am thrilled to be part of this year’s 2025 Nurture NJ Leadership Summit because being ‘United for Change’ means bringing every voice to the table—including fathers. It aligns with the League of Voices’ belief that fathers are essential to the well-being of the whole family.”

“It has been a privilege for Every Mother Counts to be engaged with Nurture NJ from the beginning. First Lady Tammy Murphy has championed a bold, community-rooted approach to improving maternal and infant health; one grounded in equity, dignity, and the belief that everyone deserves quality, respectful care. Her leadership has shown what meaningful, community-led solutions can make possible,” **said Christy Turlington Burns, Founder & President, Every Mother Counts.** “I’m honored to join this year’s Summit and look forward to seeing this momentum continue for mothers and families in New Jersey and beyond.”

"At March of Dimes, we believe every mom and baby deserves the healthiest possible start. The Nurture NJ Leadership Summit is a powerful opportunity to come together with our community partners, and March of Dimes is proud to stand united with them in driving change that is equitable, sustainable and centered in community," **said Shakira Williams-Linzey, Director of Maternal Infant Health, NY/NJ, March of Dimes.**

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