



For Immediate Release

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University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill receives funding to reduce infant mortality and improve birth outcomes by advancing young women's health and wellness nationally

New funding will support preconception health pilot programs focused on the preventative well visit.

Chapel Hill, N.C.— The Center for Maternal and Infant Health at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (UNC CMIH) received new funding to reduce infant mortality and improve birth outcomes by advancing the status of women's preconception health (health and wellness prior to pregnancy), particularly for low-income women and women of color in some of the country's most underserved communities.

This funding is one of four cooperative agreements awarded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Health Resources and Services Administration Maternal and Child Health Bureau (HRSA MCHB) to a national coalition supported by UNC CMIH, the National Preconception Health and Health Care Initiative (PCHHC). Funding will be administered through UNC School of Social Work.

Supported by and within HRSA MCHB's Collaborative Improvement and Innovation Network on Infant Mortality (IM CoIN) initiative, this Preconception CoIN team will develop, implement, and disseminate a woman-centered, clinician-engaged, community-supported approach to the well-woman visit.

With this funding, UNC CMIH will work with four state teams (California, Delaware, North Carolina, and Oklahoma), with support from PCHHC, to develop adaptable models that effectively integrate preconception care into the well-woman visit. UNC CMIH, PCHHC, and the states teams will be working with clinics to implement validated screening tools and response strategies; enhancing state-level capacity to support effective implementation; and disseminating the model nationally.

"With this award, we hope to increase the likelihood that women will not only have an annual preventive health care visit, but that the care they receive meets their unique needs and includes clinical and community supports as they work toward their personal wellness goals," said Sarah Verbiest, DrPH, executive director of UNC CMIH.

"Not only does this benefit young women across their lifespan, preconception wellness lays a foundation of health for any children they may choose to have," Verbiest added. "This project builds on established national, state, and community partnerships and strategies that provide a strong foundation and approach for this collective work."

This award, which totals nearly \$1.49 million in aggregate over three years, centers on Title V programs and multi-disciplinary teams in California, Delaware, North Carolina, and Oklahoma as partners in the



work. Each state will receive financial resources specifically tailored to support their clinic-level data collection, enhancing preconception health resources and services in their state, outreach to spread successful models and other state specific strategies, such as an electronic pre-visit assessment tool in Oklahoma. The project will assist Title V programs in achieving the National Performance Measure on increasing well-woman visits and contribute to national goals related to infant mortality and perinatal outcomes.

"The project will look different in every state, resulting in a variety of preconception care models tailored to different settings," Verbiest said. "This is one of the largest preconception projects that we've had nationally to-date. The investment in the health of women who are NOT pregnant is an important paradigm shift."

"This work takes on a greater urgency in the face of increasing rates of preterm birth as well as increasing rates of maternal sickness and death, along with major disparities for women of color."

"PCHHC and UNC CMIH have been working with leaders across the country for years toward advancing preconception health in the U.S. This CoIIN brings an opportunity to deepen our learning, engagement, and improve processes across health systems, clinics, and communities," said Diana Ramos, MPH, MD, clinical workgroup co-chair of PCHHC. "We have an opportunity to better understand, serve, and improve women's health care across touchpoints. We're proud to partner with these four states to create resources and disrupt current care standards for women across the country."

UNC Social Work and School of Medicine and the Mountain Area Health Education Center will lend expertise by hosting in-person and virtual meetings, as well as responding to clinic and state requests for training and technical assistance on a range of topics, such as behavioral health, immigrant and refugee wellness, intimate partner violence, trauma-informed care, policy, chronic disease management, and quality improvement. Experts on human-centered design, health care policy, data, and community engagement are also part of the core CoIIN team.

For more information about preconception health, visit [ShowYourLoveToday.com](https://www.showyourlovetoday.com) or [BeforeandBeyond.org](https://www.beforeandbeyond.org). To learn more about the work of UNC Center for Maternal and Infant Health, visit [mombaby.org](https://www.mombaby.org).

ABOUT HRSA IM CoIIN PRECONCEPTION PROJECT:

This project is supported by the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) under grant number UF3MC31239- Preconception CoIIN. The grant amount totals \$1,494,993. This information or content and conclusions are those of the author and should not be construed as the official position or policy of, nor should any endorsements be inferred by HRSA, HHS or the U.S. Government.