

Pregnant and Postpartum Women

Maternal depression occurs in 10%–20% of new mothers, and the likelihood increases if the mother has had previous depression or financial hardship.¹ Maternal mental health affects the health of the child as well, with unaddressed problems increasing the child’s risk of developing his or her own mental health problems later in life.² Despite the prevalence of maternal mental health (MMH) conditions and their impact on early childhood development, pregnant and postpartum women consistently lack access to educational, economic, and health-related assistance.

INTEGRATING SERVICES

Integration of effective mental health services and supports into maternity care has received even less attention than other primary care settings, despite the increased stress and developmental implications of pregnancy. That said, a number of innovative maternity care models have been pioneered that provide different kinds of support to women and have been linked to better mental health outcomes, but these have not attained scale. Federal policy can accelerate the integration of services and expand access to effective models of care.

ACTION ITEMS

- The federal government should **make Medicaid coverage for women up to one year postpartum a mandatory eligibility category for coverage.**
- The federal government should **include measures of screening and effective coordination of care** for maternal behavioral health in hospital incentive programs for care transitions and quality/safety — including coordination with social services throughout the perinatal period, such as the early intervention Program for Infants and Toddlers with Disabilities (Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act).
- The federal government should **dedicate community development resources for building new centers** that offer evidence-based models of comprehensive perinatal care that includes behavioral health supports in underserved areas, in instances where such care would be covered by state Medicaid programs.
- The federal government should **create a seed fund that supports maternity care providers** in developing the necessary capacity to begin seeking sustainable reimbursement for evidence-based models of comprehensive perinatal care that includes behavioral health supports.
- The federal government should **make available planning grants and state learning collaboratives** to design and implement effective Medicaid waivers and state plan amendments that meaningfully expand access to evidence-based models of comprehensive perinatal care that includes behavioral health supports.



¹ “Maternal Depression Can Undermine the Development of Young Children: Working Paper No. 8” (Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University, 2009), <http://www.developingchild.harvard.edu>.

² Pawluski JL, Lonstein JS, Fleming AS. The neurobiology of postpartum anxiety and depression. *Trends Neurosci.* 2017;40(2):106-20.