

Policy Brief:

Supporting the Rural Maternal and Obstetric Modernization of Services Act H.R. 4243 will improve birth outcomes in rural communities and decrease maternal morbidity

Issue:

- One fifth of Americans live in a rural community, including 18 million women of reproductive age.¹
- Health disparities impacting rural communities include premature birth, low birth weight, maternal mortality and morbidity, and increased risk of postpartum depression
- Health disparities disproportionately impact American Indians, Alaskan Natives, African Americans, Hispanics and low-income populations²
- Between 2004 and 2014, 179 rural counties lost or closed their obstetric services¹
- Fewer than 50% of rural women have access to perinatal services within a 30-mile drive of their home¹
- More than 10% of rural women drive 100 miles or more for these services¹

H.R. 4243 proposes to:

- Connect individuals with care providers
- Identify successful maternal-care models
- Facilitate collaboration among rural providers
- Provide training and guidance to healthcare providers
- Collaborate with academic institutions that have regional expertise
- Measure and address inequities in birth outcomes among rural residents
- Add maternal health services as part of the telehealth network
- Improve research and reporting requirements with respect to data on maternal health outcomes³

Funding for H.R. 4243:

- Money is provided by the Treasury to the Secretary and put into action by the Health Resources and Services Administration
- \$3,000,000 for each fiscal year from 2020 through 2024.³
- The Health Resources and Services Administration will award grants to:
 - Train healthcare providers in rural communities
 - Support academic programs to develop or provide training to improve maternal healthcare in rural communities

Expanding H.R. 4243

- Improve access to care and health outcomes for children
- Provide opportunities for provider-patient interactions via technology
- Improve overall care coordination
- Increase access to mental health services for youth
- Maximize the role of nurse practitioners during a health care workforce shortage
- Improve communication between patients and care teams

Cost-saving solution:

In 2012, The US Department of Health and Human Services launched the Strong Start for Mothers and Newborns Initiative in order to reduce preterm births and improve outcomes for newborns and pregnant women. This initiative gave women receiving Medicaid the opportunity to seek prenatal care at Strong Start Birth Centers. Results of the initiative revealed that women who received prenatal services at the Strong Start Birth Centers had improved birth outcomes in comparison to those who did not receive prenatal care at Strong Start Birth Centers. Rates of preterm birth, low birthweight, and cesarean section were lower among women who attended Strong Start Birth Centers, and costs were more than \$2,000 lower per mother-infant pair during and one year after birth.¹ This example proves that expanding access to prenatal care is a cost-saving initiative. H.R. 4243 would provide necessary access to prenatal care.

Summary:

We urge the support of the Rural Maternal and Obstetric Modernization of Services Act H.R. 4243. Support of this act will improve access to prenatal and postnatal healthcare and will decrease health disparities amongst minority and low-income populations living in rural areas. It will foster improved health outcomes for women and children living in rural areas and will reduce the financial burden associated with health disparities such as prematurity, maternal mortality, and maternal morbidity.

References:

1. <https://www.cms.gov/About-CMS/Agency-Information/OMH/equity-initiatives/rural-health/09032019-Maternal-Health-Care-in-Rural-Communities.pdf>
2. <https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CFH/DMCAH/MIHA/CDPH%20Document%20Library/AIAN-MIH-Status-Report-2019.pdf>
3. <https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/house-bill/4243>

Other helpful resources:

1. <https://www.dhcs.ca.gov/services/Documents/Whole-Child-Model-Access-to-Rural-Health-Care.pdf>
2. https://www.cchpca.org/sites/default/files/2019-08/Medi-Cal%20Fact%20Sheet%20FINAL_0.pdf
3. https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/98964/neonatal_abstinence_syndrome_and_maternal_access_to_treatment_for_opioid_use_disorder_in_california_counties_1.pdf
4. <https://www.hrsa.gov/ruralhealth/programopportunities/fundingopportunities/?id=cd800702-2c77-4f0d-9cf0-5d915c0924d1>
5. <https://www.congress.gov/bill/115th-congress/house-bill/315>