

20 Years of the Delaware Healthy Mother & Infant Consortium:

Embracing the Celebration, Heeding the Call to Action

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On April 13, 2026, at our annual summit, the Delaware Healthy Mother & Infant Consortium (DHMIC) marked a milestone: 20 years of work dedicated to improving maternal and infant health in Delaware. As we experienced more than 400 community partners and advocates checking in for the event, it occurred to us that DHMIC has spanned a common benchmark for a “generation” of time. The babies of the mothers we supported in our early years are now approaching the age of becoming parents themselves.

This is incredibly humbling, and DHMIC is motivated by the knowledge that not only are we still here, but over these past two decades we have also increased the share of healthy births and established a continuum of care for mothers and babies. We’re also very excited for the opportunities we have in front of us to evolve with our communities, health systems, and policymakers to work together to meet families where they are today and in the future. Our goals are many, but they are achievable. They include providing meaningful support to inspire change for the better and continue to reduce Delaware’s infant mortality rates. We also aim to reach more deeply into the neighborhoods of at-risk populations and ensure no one is left behind, and to continue to reduce racial, ethnic, and geographic disparate health outcomes for moms and babies.

This 20th anniversary puts DHMIC at an incredible convergence of past, present, and future. A milestone like this naturally focuses an organization like ours on learning from the past not just by celebrating our successes but also by respecting the “road bumps” along the way, which only make us stronger. It also calls on us to take a hard look at one of our greatest challenges today — health equity — and how we can drive greater progress in this area for moms and babies. And it provides a unique platform for us to envision the next 20 years and the ways DHMIC will shape the future of maternal and child health.

Celebrating 20 Years

In 2005, the Delaware Infant Mortality Task Force (IMTF) put forth a final report that included a three-year plan with 20 recommendations to reduce the high infant mortality rate in Delaware. The task force needed to address a critical challenge in our state: Delaware had the sixth-highest infant mortality rate in the nation, with significant disparities across racial and ethnic groups. This equated to 9.3 infant deaths per 1,000 live births.¹ Recognizing the urgency of this issue, DHMIC was established under IMTF’s third recommendation and formalized in Delaware law in

2006. DHMIC was charged with a clear mission: to prevent infant mortality, to improve the health of women of childbearing age and infants in Delaware, and to reduce health disparities across our communities. We began establishing meaningful maternal and child health partnerships with health, social services, and community-based organizations.

DHMIC's timeline shows a progression of eras — moving the community from crisis to collaboration, expanding access to maternal health services, uniting communities in the effort to reduce infant mortality, addressing disparities, strengthening prevention services, driving key legislation and transitioning maternal health innovation from a concept to a law, and continuing to strengthen the maternal health systems and workforce while advancing perinatal mental health. On behalf of the hundreds of individuals and organizations over the years who have believed in the DHMIC mission and invested their time, thinking, resources, and capabilities to support our progress we are proud to recap some of the greatest achievements along the DHMIC timeline:

- 2005 — Delaware's infant mortality rate (IMR), as reported by the Delaware Division of Public Health (DPH), was the sixth highest in the nation, with significant disparities across racial and ethnic groups. There were 9.3 infant deaths per 1,000 live births (representing a five-year average from 2000 to 2004).¹
- 2006 — The IMTF produced several recommendations, including formally establishing DHMIC in Delaware law as a statewide, collaborative body focused on improving maternal and infant health outcomes and reducing disparities.
- 2008 — Statewide prevention and education efforts expanded as DHMIC established committees, began a safe-sleep campaign (Long Live Dreams) based on the American Academy of Pediatrics guidelines, scaled up preconception health initiatives, and increased public awareness efforts that addressed prematurity and infant mortality risk factors.
- 2009 — Infant mortality rates began to decline.
- 2010 — As a result of the Affordable Care Act, the Maternal Infant and Early Childhood Home Visiting Program launched voluntary evidence-based Home Visiting Programs to serve families across the state.
- 2011 — Birthing hospitals began participating in coordinated maternal and infant quality-improvement initiatives, and statewide collaboration was established between hospitals, public health agencies, and maternal health experts.
- 2013 — Programs expanded access to maternal health services, specifically for underserved communities. Statewide education on safe sleep, reproductive life planning, and the health benefits of breastfeeding for both moms and babies continued.
- 2015 — Community-based strategies were implemented, including the Medical-Legal Partnership Program between DPH and the Community Legal Aid Society Inc. to develop a medical-legal partnership focused on supporting high-risk pregnant women in the Healthy Women, Healthy Babies program.

- 2017 — DHMIC strengthened preconception and postpartum interventions as well as maternal health education initiatives, while focusing on reducing racial, ethnic, and geographic disparities in maternal and infant outcomes.
- 2019 — The Delaware Perinatal Quality Collaborative (DPQC) was formally codified in Delaware law, providing a framework to support sustained statewide quality-improvement efforts in perinatal care.
- 2020 — Delaware’s infant mortality rate declined to 6.5 deaths per 1,000 live births for the 2016–2020 period. This was a significant milestone compared to the state’s five-year average at the time the DHMIC was established, and it reflected sustained progress in maternal and child health efforts.
- 2022 — The Guaranteed Basic Income Pilot Program launched, providing pregnant women in the first and second trimester of their pregnancy with a guaranteed income of \$1,000 each month for two years.
- 2022 — The Momnibus Legislation passed in the Delaware General Assembly, representing a comprehensive legislative effort to address racial disparities and improve maternal and infant health outcomes.
- 2024 — The Delaware Home Visiting Program served 655 Delaware families and 634 children through 7,181 visits. This voluntary, evidence-based program promotes maternal and child health, strengthens parenting, and improves long-term family outcomes.
- 2026 — Delaware advanced statewide efforts to strengthen perinatal mental health access, screening, and support through House Concurrent Resolution 82 (HCR 82).

Heeding Our Call to Action

Since 2004, Delaware’s IMR has dropped from the sixth-highest to the 22nd-highest in the nation.² Overall, our state has seen a 36.2% reduction in infant mortality and a 17% increase in pregnancy intention.³ And according to the five-year Delaware IMR average for currently available data (2017 to 2021), the state has reached a record-low infant mortality rate of 5.9 infant deaths per 1,000 live births. Certainly, we are proud of our accomplishments, but more importantly, these achievements serve as one of DHMIC’s greatest motivators as we look at the months, years, and decades ahead.

First, while the statistics have shown impressive improvement, we have more work to do before we reach ideal numbers. Second, the activities and results along our timeline show that, for the foreseeable future, we must continue to expand and evolve our work and support. As we do more work, it will become easier for us to use our data, knowledge, and experience to uncover — and fill — gaps in service.

Lastly, our history and achievements present us with a crucial necessity: no matter what strategies we pursue as we move forward, we must continue to walk before we run. Yes, DHMIC and all our partners want to expedite our outreach, connections, and progress as much as

possible, but our history proves that success is driven by thoughtful strategies that use a collective approach to respond to immediate needs first and short-term needs second, while keeping longer-term needs in our line of sight. This is how we have progressed, and will continue to progress, without taking steps backward. This is how we will be able to identify and react to changes in our community and optimize new opportunities ranging from improved access, system updates, and policy changes to new medicines, innovative treatments, and emerging technologies. And this is how, ultimately, we will continue to not only save the lives of more infants and mothers but also ensure those individuals remain on the path of physical and mental wellness for a lifetime.

While these three goals are not the totality of the mission that will define the next chapter for DHMIC and our partners, they do provide a solid framework for our call to action for the next 20 years. This call to action is something that more than 400 attendees committed to during the 2026 DHMIC Summit, as they engaged in thoughtful discussions, explored new ideas, and planned for progress that is equitable and sustainable for every Delaware family.

In closing, on behalf of everyone who has contributed to the DHMIC mission over the past two decades — advocates, clinicians, policymakers, community leaders, and partners — as well as those who will contribute moving forward, we thank the Delaware Academy of Medicine and Public Health for distinguishing DHMIC with its 2026 Executive Director's Public Health Recognition Award. Certainly, receiving this award is a great honor. It also further strengthens DHMIC's commitment to living up to what this recognition embodies. We look forward to another 20 years of continuing to move our work forward and leading Delaware families along a journey of empowerment, defined by confidence that every mother and infant will have the support they need to not just survive but thrive.

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References

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