

LEVERAGING TECHNOLOGY TO

# Improve Maternal and Infant Health

**Despite ongoing efforts to address the maternal mortality crisis in the United States, recent evidence from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) National Center for Health Statistics showed an 18% increase in maternal mortality in the U.S. from 2019 to 2020. These worsening outcomes include worsening disparities, as Black and indigenous people who give birth are two to three times more likely to die from pregnancy-related causes than white people. Integrating telehealth and other technologies into perinatal and maternal health care can help bridge the gaps in access to obstetric care in rural and underserved communities, leading to better maternal outcomes. Access to care becomes especially relevant during health emergencies, like the COVID-19 pandemic, when many Americans had to find new ways to get care.**

Perinatal telehealth interventions can include using videoconferences to replace or supplement in-person visits, implementing at-home digital monitoring through phone apps and other devices, and enabling consultation with specialists remotely, including maternal fetal medicine doctors. In the postpartum period, telehealth and other tools can be used to enable earlier postpartum follow-up visits and to provide access to lactation consultants (tele-lactation). Electronic health records and artificial intelligence (AI) can be used to identify who is at high risk of complications while giving birth. Throughout pregnancy and postpartum, telehealth can also connect patients to mental health care.

However, the use of telehealth and other technologies can increase disparities if their use is not thoroughly supported at the local, state, and federal level. Unstable or unaffordable access to broadband internet in some areas and the costs of communication devices can limit who can use these tools. Currently, only 19 state Medicaid programs reimburse beneficiaries for telehealth services delivered to the patient in their home. This limits access to telehealth for pregnant patients on Medicaid, which covers roughly half of births in the country. During the pandemic, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) granted flexibility to states to expand

telehealth programs under Medicaid, and some states have taken action to make virtual care more accessible, like allowing people to receive care in their homes, expanding the types of providers and services eligible to deliver care virtually, and allowing providers to practice across state lines. Earlier this year, the Biden Administration released a blueprint to address the maternal health crisis, outlining actions to be taken to improve data collection, increase telehealth support in rural communities, and ultimately support better health care quality measures and outcomes for pregnant people.



Health insurance providers are implementing innovative programs that capitalize on telehealth and partnerships with innovative technology companies to better engage their pregnant members and help ensure they are receiving the care they need, when and where they need it.

- Both **Capital District Physicians' Health Plan, Inc. (CDPHP)** and **Harvard Pilgrim Health Care (HPHC)**, a Point32Health company, have partnered with [Ovia Health](#), a mobile app designed to deliver evidence-based information, support, and guidance to help users navigate fertility, pregnancy, and early parenting. The partnership provides members with access to three mobile apps - Ovia Fertility, Ovia Pregnancy, and Ovia Parenting. As compared to families not using the platform, Ovia Health reports its use has helped improve maternity outcomes and reduce maternity costs, including a 34% reduction in c-section rates, a 28% reduction in preterm delivery and neonatal intensive care unit (NICU) stays, an 18% reduction in preeclampsia, and following delivery, 92% infant vaccination rates and a 31% increase in perinatal mental health treatment.
- Using predictive modeling, **Independence Blue Cross' Baby BluePrints®** maternal care program works to better understand how social determinants of health impact high-risk maternity patients. This work includes behavioral health screenings and social needs assessments for patients who may experience barriers related to transportation, food security, and financial well-being. The program provides individualized support and information to guide members through each stage of pregnancy and post-delivery, leveraging technology to provide appropriate engagement with the prospective mother. Members who are found to have certain health issues or history that may place them at high risk are also eligible for a condition management program with a Health Coach.

- **Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina (BCBSNC)** began piloting a new maternity health AI model with its [CarePath](#) staff in March 2022. The AI model predicts the patient's risk of gestational diabetes, ER use during pregnancy, and preeclampsia, which together predict a high-risk pregnancy. BCBSNC is now piloting use of Social Vulnerability Index (SVI) data from the CDC, which includes information on race, income, and poverty level, layered on top of their AI models to help identify those who may be at risk of poor maternity outcomes and to ensure priority care for members in vulnerable populations. With the help of CarePath and AI technology, BCBSNC's goal is to reduce disparities in maternal health by 50% in five years.

**Telehealth and technology tools can help improve the perinatal experience, serving to better connect patients with their providers, more efficiently and proactively monitor potential pregnancy complications, and ultimately help promote healthier moms and healthier babies.** Health insurance providers are working with patients and providers as they continue to put in place solutions to improve maternal health outcomes. To ensure continued success with these programs and encourage future advances, we call upon the Biden Administration, Congress, and state legislatures to make permanent the pandemic-era flexibilities that allow telehealth innovation to continue, so people having babies get the care they need.

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## ABOUT AHIP

AHIP is the national association whose members provide health care coverage, services, and solutions to hundreds of millions of Americans every day. We are committed to market-based solutions and public-private partnerships that make health care better and coverage more affordable and accessible for everyone.