



The Texas Women's Healthcare Coalition (TWHC) and its 76 healthcare, faith, and community-based member organizations are dedicated to improving the health and well-being of Texas women, babies, and families by ensuring access to preventive healthcare – including health screenings and contraception – for all Texas women.

As the state develops strategies to reduce maternal mortality and improve infant health, we believe it is critical to recognize the central role family planning plays in ensuring healthy outcomes for moms and babies. A healthy pregnancy begins well before a woman becomes pregnant. Screenings for conditions like hypertension, diabetes, cervical cancer, and postpartum depression are essential for helping women identify and address health issues early. Preventive care for non-pregnant women – including access to contraception to avoid unplanned pregnancy – reduces the risks of later maternal and infant complications. Planning pregnancy also allows for healthy spacing between pregnancies, which means lower chances of preterm birth, low birthweight, and infant mortality.

It is also important to recognize family planning as a key component of a broader perinatal system. Well-woman exams are frequently women's primary entry point into healthcare services, and family planning providers are essential for connecting women to an array of health services and programs that can help them become and stay healthy. The state's Maternal Mortality and Morbidity Task Force has recognized family planning services as a key component of efforts to improve maternal health in the year following delivery and in the interconception period.

The following recommendations highlight strategies Texas can take to improve health for women before, during, and after pregnancy.

Improve continuity of care for Texas women

Access to preventive and preconception care—including health screenings and contraception—leads to better birth spacing, greater access to prenatal care, and healthier moms and babies. The state's women's health programs – Healthy Texas Women (HTW) and the Family Planning Program (FPP) – are key programs within the state's family planning safety net. Unfortunately, many low-income women are not adequately connected to these services, particularly when they transition out of a different health program.

The following recommendations would improve continuity of care between family planning programs and other health programs available to low-income women, ultimately improving health outcomes for moms and babies.

- ❖ **Identify strategies for increasing the number of women who receive health services after being auto-enrolled from Medicaid into Healthy Texas Women (HTW) 60 days postpartum.** Auto-enrollment has been an important policy change with the potential to substantially increase the number of women who access health care after they deliver through Medicaid. However, in order to fulfill the intent of this policy, the state should identify ways to ensure more women who are auto-enrolled actually receive services.

- ❖ **Identify methods to improve continuity of care between CHIP Perinatal and the Family Planning Program (FPP).** Too many women who deliver through CHIP Perinatal lose access to any source of health care after their postpartum coverage ends, and may be unaware that they qualify for FPP. Strategies that improve postpartum enrollment into FPP are essential for improving health outcomes for moms and babies in our state.
- ❖ **Identify ways to improve CHIP clients' access to family planning services while enrolled in CHIP, as well as after they age out of CHIP or Children's Medicaid.** CHIP clients cannot currently access family planning services through HTW. This population faces additional barriers when they age out of CHIP, as they are not currently auto-enrolled into HTW. By addressing these barriers to access to care, Texas can make important strides in reducing the state's high teen pregnancy rates.
- ❖ **Identify ways to use multiple points of contact – such as community health workers, health plans, or peer services – to increase awareness of and access to the state's women's health programs.** Despite strong efforts by HHSC, many women remain unaware of available women's health programs or how to access them. The state should identify ways to better coordinate with existing stakeholders to increase outreach and enrollment.
- ❖ **Study the health benefits and potential cost-savings of enabling women in the state to receive a one-year supply of birth control at a single pharmacy visit, if prescribed.** Running out of birth control pills is among the primary reasons women discontinue oral contraceptive use, and many women struggle to maintain consistent contraceptive use when they are forced to return to the pharmacy every month to receive their next supply. A common-sense solution for increasing continuation of birth control and reducing unintended pregnancies is enabling women to receive a larger supply at one time.
- ❖ **Examine strategies to increase access to Long Acting Reversible Contraception (LARC).** LARC methods, including implants and IUDs, are twenty times more effective than other contraceptive methods, and are considered the first-line choice for women by medical organizations. They can play a critical role in the state's efforts to improve maternal health and birth outcomes by reducing unintended pregnancy and improving birth spacing for Texas moms. The state should study and address the biggest barriers to LARC access, including low reimbursement rates, inadequate training and education for providers, and unmet demand within the CHIP Perinatal program.

Integrate family planning into the state's efforts to improve infant and maternal health.

Family planning is a core component of a broader perinatal system serving women during and after pregnancy. The TWHC supports the work of organizations seeking to improve infant and maternal health, recognizing that the best infant and maternal health outcomes occur when we have a coordinated system that smoothly connects women to the care they need.

We urge the state to consider the following ways to integrate family planning into a broader strategic plan to improve infant and maternal health outcomes.

- ❖ **Develop a vision for an integrated perinatal system in Texas, one that recognizes family planning services as essential to infant and maternal health.** Review Texas programs, advisory councils, and initiatives focused on improving health for women, mothers, and babies. Look to other states that have successfully developed cohesive, integrated perinatal care systems. Identify opportunities to improve communication and efficiencies among Texas health initiatives and develop a more coordinated perinatal system across the state.
- ❖ **Identify strategies for increasing the number of women receiving early prenatal care, including by increasing the number of women with access to family planning services.** Family planning is a core component in improving access to and receipt of prenatal care. Women who receive family planning services and plan their pregnancies are significantly more likely to access prenatal care. As the state examines an array of strategies to improve access to prenatal care, we recommend continued study of how the states' family planning programs can be better integrated into efforts to connect women to timely prenatal care.
- ❖ **Examine ways to better integrate family planning services and substance use counseling.** Family planning providers offer critical screening and referral services to women at risk of substance use disorders. Additionally, the American Congress of Obstetrics and Gynecology (ACOG) recommends that contraceptive counseling and access to contraceptive services be a routine part of substance use disorder treatment among women of reproductive age, who experience higher rates of unintended pregnancy than the general population. Integrating family planning services and substance use counseling is an important strategy for reducing health risks for women, moms, and babies.

Texas Women's Healthcare Coalition Steering Committee Members

Texas Medical Association
 District XI (Texas) American Congress of Obstetricians and Gynecologists
 Texas Academy of Family Physicians
 Texas Association of Community Health Centers
 Methodist Healthcare Ministries
 Teaching Hospitals of Texas
 Women's Health and Family Planning Association of Texas
 Texans Care for Children
 Center for Public Policy Priorities
 Healthy Futures of Texas

Texas Women's Healthcare Coalition General Members

Access Esperanza Clinics Inc.	National Latina Institute for Reproductive Health
Amistad Community Health Center	North Harris Montgomery Advanced Practice Nurse Society
Austin Advanced Practice Nurses	North Texas Alliance to Reduce Teen Pregnancy
Austin Physicians for Social Responsibility	North Texas Nurse Practitioners
AWHONN Texas	Panhandle Nurse Practitioner Association
Brazos Valley Community Action Agency, Inc.	Pasadena Health Center
Brazos Valley Nurse Practitioner Association	People's Community Clinic
Cardea	Port Arthur Housing Authority
Center for Community Health, UNTHSC	Pregnancy and Postpartum Health Alliance of Texas
Central Texas Nurse Practitioners	SALVERE (Striving to Achieve Literacy via Education,
Children's Hospital Association of Texas	Research, and Engagement)
Coalition for Nurses in Advanced Practice	San Antonio Metropolitan Health District
Coastal Bend Advanced Practice Nurses	San Antonio Nurses in Advanced Practice
Coastal Bend Wellness Foundation	Schneider Communications
Community Healthcare Center	South Plains Nurse Practitioner Association
Consortium of Texas Certified Nurse Midwives	South Texas Family Planning & Health Corp.
Department of Ob/Gyn of UNTHSC and the ForHER	Southeast Texas Nurse Practitioner Associates
Institute	Special Health Resources
El Buen Samaritano	St. David's Foundation
El Centro De Corazón	Texas Association of Obstetricians and Gynecologists
El Paso Area Advanced Practice Nurse Association	Texas Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy
Food Bank of the Rio Grande Valley	Texas Council on Family Violence
Fort Worth Region Nurse Practitioners	Texas Health Institute
Gateway to Care	Texas Hospital Association
Good Neighbor Health Center	Texas Medical Association Alliance
Haven Health	Texas Nurse Practitioners
Hill Country Advanced Practice Nurses & Physicians	Texas Nurses Association
Assistants Association	Texas Pediatric Society
Houston Area Chapter of NAPNAP	Texas Unitarian Universalist Justice Ministry
Houston Area Nurse Practitioners	The Contraceptive Initiative
League of Women Voters of Texas	The SAFE Alliance
Legacy Community Health Services	University Health System
March of Dimes - Texas	Valley AIDS Council
Mental Health America of Greater Houston	Women's & Men's Health Services of the Coastal Bend, Inc.
National Council of Jewish Women—Texas State Policy	
Advocacy Network	