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Making a Difference in Infant Mortality

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Making a Difference in Infant Mortality

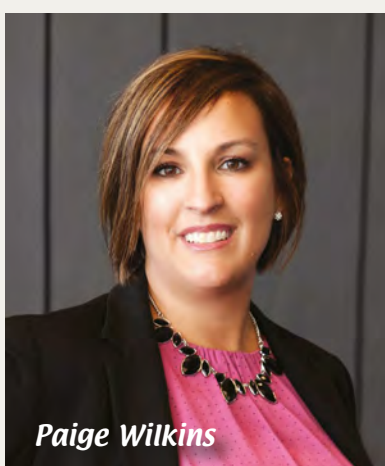


by Mary Jane Bogle

Most people in Allen County are unaware of our dismal record when it comes to infant and maternal mortality. According to Footprints Fort Wayne, a collaborative effort to improve Allen County's infant mortality rate, Allen County's infant mortality rate in 2017 was 7.3, as compared to the national rate of 5.9.



Ethel Massing



Paige Wilkins

Naturally, these numbers are alarming and not just for new or expectant mothers. This rate affects all of us, as Ethel Massing, innovation project specialist at the Parkview Mirro Center for Research & Innovation, explained. "The infant mortality rate is really the canary in the coal mine," she said. "A high infant mortality rate means other healthcare issues are prevalent in our community."

Paige Wilkins, executive director of Healthier Moms and Babies, agrees. "Indiana doesn't rank well in overall health outcomes," she said. "We have high obesity and diabetes rates, and we rank 46th in the nation for people who smoke."

In addition, Allen County is experiencing significant health disparities by zip code and race. According to Footprints Fort Wayne, "African American families are over twice as likely to experience the loss of a baby."

Multiple issues affect these statistics. For example, living in a community marked by violence can result in preterm births and/or preeclampsia. Both

contribute to infant mortality. Mothers without ready access to healthcare, either before, during or after the pregnancy, are also at higher risk.

Thankfully, these numbers don't tell the whole story. Both Wilkins and Massing are spearheading significant efforts to change Allen County's infant mortality rate. Here are a few ways they're making an impact.

Healthy Mom and Baby Innovation Competition


A collaborative effort between Parkview Health and MATTER (a healthcare startup incubator, community nexus and corporate innovation accelerator), the Healthy Mom and Baby Innovation Competition issued a global call in 2020 to combat the infant mortality rate in Allen County. Candlelit Therapy, a prenatal mental health startup aimed at helping underserved women navigate pregnancy and postpartum, was selected as the overall winner of the Innovation Competition.

Education and Advocacy

Healthier Moms and Babies is making significant strides in working with at-risk families from pre-pregnancy until a baby turns two. Through home visits, healthcare advocacy and prenatal and postnatal health education support, Healthier Moms and Babies is working to reach their vision of "Every baby. Born healthy."

Programs include Healthy Start, Nurse Family Partnership, Baby & Me Tobacco Free, Fatherhood Initiative, Cribs for Kids and Own Your Journey, which connects participants with other women who share similar goals and helps them learn how they can lead a healthy life for themselves and their babies.

Prematurity Awareness Walk

This virtual event on October 24, 2020, will feature a guest speaker and a flower drop to honor all preterm babies in the community, with the goal of celebrating the first steps, first words, first birthdays of Allen County's tiniest neighbors. For more information or to purchase a yard sign to help support this event, contact Healthier Moms and Babies at (260) 469-4076. 

Resources:

Healthier Moms and Babies, Fort Wayne, 260.469.4076, healthiermomsandbabies.org

Parkview Mirro Center for Health & Innovation, Fort Wayne, 260.266.7701, parkview.com