

ABOUT US

Since 1973, Healthy Mothers, Healthy Babies Coalition of Georgia has worked to improve maternal and child health through advocacy, education and access to vital resources. Learn more online at www.hmhbga.org.

Support an increase in the tobacco tax to meet the national average.

Increasing the state tobacco tax would save lives and reduce teen smoking. Importantly, nearly 90% of all smokers began smoking in their teens. In short, adults don't start smoking, kids do. For every 10% increase in the cost of cigarettes, there is a 7% reduction in teen smoking and an overall consumption decrease of about 4%. Many of today's teen smokers will become our pregnant mothers of the future. Smoking during pregnancy puts moms and babies at higher risk for medical complications including placental hemorrhaging, fetal growth restriction and preterm birth. Georgia has one of the lowest tobacco tax rates in the nation, ranking 49th of the 50 states. Currently, the Georgia tobacco tax is only .37 cents per pack compared to the national average of \$1.66 a pack. HMHB supports raising the tobacco tax by \$1.23 in order to get closer to the national average. A recent fiscal note indicated that such an increase would generate \$585 million/year in new revenue.

Support incremental increases in Medicaid/Peachcare provider reimbursement rates.

Medicaid and PeachCare ensure access to dental and health care for many low-income Georgians. HMHB supports incremental increases to Medicaid/Peachcare provider rates, as the current low rates discourage participation by dental and medical care providers. Calls to HMHB's PowerLine indicate that many Georgians, especially those in rural areas, are having difficulty locating a physician or dentist who will accept Medicaid. Though the state made progress last year in getting closer to parity with Medicare payments, Medicaid still pays less than the cost to provide the services. Reimbursement rates should keep pace with the actual cost of providing the care. Funding to cover the gap could be raised by increasing the cigarette excise tax discussed above.



Support prenatal care policies that will improve fetal and infant health outcomes.

Currently, Georgia's fetal mortality is almost 33% higher than the national average, and unlike most states, Georgia routinely has more fetal deaths (after 20 weeks gestation) than it has infant deaths; Georgia ranks 47th in the nation for its low birthweight babies and 45th in the nation for its infant mortality. DPH reports that it costs \$27,000 per pound to raise a low or very low birthweight baby to normal weight. DCH reports that very low birth weight babies (< 3 lbs 5 oz) account for approximately 2% of all births, but account for 50% of all infant deaths.

- **Dental care** in pregnancy is encouraged by the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists. The National Institute for Health Care Management also supports prenatal dental care summarizing research that showed preterm birth was 42% higher and low birthweight was 33% higher for the babies of women, who had dental insurance, but who did not access any dental care during pregnancy. In Georgia only 29.3% of pregnant women are getting dental care and only 10-18% of pregnant CMO/Medicaid recipients are getting dental care (even though it is a covered service). We recommend policies that embed the need for prenatal dental care in communications to pregnant women.
- **Flu shots** in pregnancy have been associated with a significant reduction in the risk of stillbirth, reduced numbers of preterm and low birthweight babies and significant decreases (81-91%) in the risk of infant influenza hospitalization during the first six months of life. If the obstetrical clinician offers the flu shot, CDC data shows that a pregnant woman is eight times more likely to get the vaccine than when the clinician does not give or mention the vaccine. Although recommended by the CDC for pregnant women, in Georgia, only 17% are getting the seasonal flu vaccine compared to the national survey average of 50%. To incentivize obstetrical clinicians to give in-house inoculations to pregnant women, we recommend higher reimbursement rates for the medical service.

QUESTIONS? WANT TO GET INVOLVED?

Healthy Mothers, Healthy Babies Coalition of Georgia is a membership organization. We welcome your inquiries and interest in becoming a member or advocacy volunteer. Email us at thecoalition@hmhbga.org.

