

Maternal & Child Health Equity Action Network



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Improving maternal and child health (MCH) in North Carolina requires a coordinated, multisectoral approach. In 2023, the Foundation for Health Leadership & Innovation (FHLI) launched the Maternal Child Health Equity Action Network (MCHEAN), a collaborative, community-driven initiative aimed at addressing maternal and child health disparities. In 2024, MCHEAN released a report, *Rising from Challenges to Change: A Cross-Sector Action Plan for Maternal and Child Health Equity in North Carolina*, outlining co-created action plans and policy priorities to guide future work.

Action Plans

- 1 Provide Public Perinatal Health Education



- 2 Develop a Shared Understanding of Care Standards



- 3 Educate & Engage Co-Parents & Support Persons



- 4 Educate Patients & Provide Advocacy Training



Policy Priorities

1. Support and advocate for midwives and doulas statewide
2. Expand reimbursement for all care settings
3. Advocate value-based care models
4. Advocate for paid parental leave



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The MCHEAN Approach to Community Co-Design

"If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together."
— African Proverb

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Building the Network: A Collaborative, Community-Driven Initiative

MCHEAN facilitators brought together professionals and community members to discuss maternal and child health (MCH) disparities in North Carolina. The diverse perspectives shared during these meetings fostered meaningful and nuanced conversations that laid the groundwork for creating equitable and culturally sensitive action plans and policy priorities. The network also recognized the impact of systemic racism and emphasized the need to address social drivers of health and structural barriers.

Participation Highlights:

- Recruited over 50 participants from 25 organizations across 41 counties, including 25 rural and 16 urban.
- Approximately 50% of network members had lived experience related to MCH equity challenges.
- Approximately two-thirds of participants had professional MCH experience.
- Hosted focus groups with 173 participants across the state.

Elevating Community Voices in Maternal & Child Health

FHLI's Community Voice Model (CVM) and Human-Centered Design (HCD) principles shaped MCHEAN's inclusive, equity-focused approach. By prioritizing trust, authentic engagement, and community-led solutions, the network encouraged ongoing participation, continuous feedback, and more effective, scalable action plans.

Keystones of the Approach:

- Grounded in empathy, lived experience, and co-creation.
- Centers and elevates the voices of those most impacted.
- Helps generate insights that drive systems-level change.

Addressing Gaps in Rural Maternal & Child Health

With the second-largest rural population in the U.S., North Carolina must ensure MCH solutions work for rural families. The action plans prioritize rural needs at every stage.

Strategies to Improve Rural Health Access:

- Expand outreach programs to connect families with essential services.
- Strengthen local partnerships, especially where hospital closures have impacted care.
- Increase investment in infrastructure, telehealth, and rural health systems.



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