

Support the extension of pregnancy Medicaid for women up to one year postpartum

The current COVID-19 pandemic coupled with Georgia's maternal mortality crisis has brought a range of concerns highlighting the need for continued access to medical care in the postpartum period. The changing environment caused by the pandemic may complicate issues facing new mothers. Due to our overwhelmed healthcare system, access to preventive or postpartum care is limited, which may have long-term effects for Georgia's mothers and babies. Families with new babies are dealing with additional stresses of ill family members, job losses due to COVID-19, and uncertainty about the effects of COVID-19 on babies before and after birth. Additionally, isolation related to social distancing may affect perinatal anxiety and depression especially when caring for a new baby.

Women are at risk for pregnancy-related mortality and morbidity throughout the first year after delivery. In 2014, the latest data available, 65% of Georgia's pregnancy-related deaths that occurred between 6 weeks to one year postpartum were deemed preventable, according to the Georgia Maternal Mortality Review Committee. Access to medical care during the postpartum period can be a critical tool in addressing the State's maternal mortality crisis.

Medicaid has long played an important role in financing healthcare for low-income pregnant women, covering a vulnerable population and promoting healthy birth outcomes. Pregnancy Medicaid covers a range of necessary and important medical services for eligible pregnant women. However, this coverage ends 60 days after delivery, resulting in many mothers losing health coverage during a critical period for several causes of death.



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The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) and the American College of Nurse Midwives (ACNM) recommend that postpartum care be an ongoing process tailored to the needs of the patient. Access to care is critical to ensure providers are able to implement this recommendation and that mothers receive the appropriate care for as long as needed post-delivery. For many mothers covered by pregnancy Medicaid in Georgia, loss of coverage means they are no longer able to access healthcare providers and receive adequate postpartum care after 60 days.

The Georgia Maternal Mortality Review Committee, House Study Committee on Maternal Mortality, and House Study Committee on Infant and Toddler Social and Emotional Health recommend extending access to healthcare coverage to one year postpartum to ensure that medical and behavioral health conditions can be managed and treated before becoming progressively severe and/or before another pregnancy. The leading causes of maternal death include cardiomyopathy and hemorrhage. Georgia mothers need continued healthcare up to one year postpartum to access services critical to preventing these causes of deaths.

More than half of all births in Georgia are covered by Medicaid and by extending the period for postpartum coverage, the State has an opportunity to improve women's health and birth outcomes. Specifically, we believe extending postpartum coverage would:

- Reduce maternal mortality
- Improve maternal health
- Promote early detection and treatment of postpartum depression and related mental health conditions
- Reduce the rate of low birthweight and preterm births (wrap-around services to prevent poor birth outcomes in future pregnancies)
- Reduce healthcare costs to the State
- Support reimbursements for care given in rural Georgia

