

Infographic

Addressing Black Maternal Mortality

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Abstract

Increasing rates of maternal morbidity and mortality is a growing concern in many industrialized countries. Data from US maternal mortality review committees indicate that more than 80% of these deaths are preventable (Troost et al., 2019). Various factors contributing to this issue include advancing maternal age, increased adults living with congenital disease that may affect outcomes and increased prevalence of comorbidities such as diabetes and hypertension (Fink et al., 2023). In the United States, black women are disproportionately affected by maternal mortality and severe maternal morbidity, facing rates almost three times higher than those of white women (Hoyert, 2023). Few Canadian studies exist, but they echo similar findings. Research by McKinnon and colleagues (2016) found that Black women were more likely to have premature babies and have their pain experiences discounted. A more recent qualitative study based in Toronto reported pervasive obstetric racism experienced by Black women (Boakye et al., 2023). These disparities stem from a complex interplay of factors, including systemic racism, socio-economic disparities, and unequal access to quality healthcare. Unfortunately, research on Black maternal mortality and morbidity is limited in Canada, and we lack a much-needed national system to track these outcomes. Unlike the United States, few Canadian health agencies collect racial statistics. However, disaggregated race-based data is critical for informing targeted interventions and policy changes. This infographic was created under the umbrella of *The Newcomer Health Hub*, a Canadian medical student-run organization that seeks to increase awareness of health-care disparities in order to improve medical training. Infographics play a crucial role in enhancing comprehension, increasing engagement, and promoting health literacy. Together, through education, advocacy, and community engagement, we can work towards ensuring that every mother receives the support, resources, and care they need to have a safe and healthy pregnancy and childbirth experience, regardless of race or ethnicity.

Keywords: Black Women, Maternal, Race-based

ADDRESSING BLACK MATERNAL MORTALITY

"Pregnancy-Related Death (maternal mortality) is defined as the death of a woman during pregnancy, at delivery, or within one year of giving birth from a pregnancy complication" - CDC, 2020

Black women are disproportionately affected by maternal morbidity and mortality - CDC, 2023

RACIAL DISPARITIES IN PREGNANCY-RELATED DEATHS

Black women over the age of >30 are at significantly increased risk of pregnancy-related mortality

Black women are **3X** more likely to die during pregnancy and child-birth compared to White women

Black women disproportionately experience adverse pregnancy outcomes regardless of **income & educational level**

60% of pregnancy-related deaths are preventable in the US

Black women are more likely to receive **poorer quality** of obstetric care in hospitals compared to White women

Maternal Deaths Per 100,000 live births in the US, 2018-2021

Where is Canada's data? Currently, no consistent national system exists to collect data on maternal deaths and there is a significant inadequacy of race-based data.

CAUSES OF MATERNAL MORTALITY ARE COMPLEX AND MULTIFACTORIAL:

1. **Direct obstetric causes** (ex/hemorrhage, hypertension)
2. **Pre-existing medical conditions** (ex/heart disease, diabetes)
3. **Socioeconomic factors** (ex/lack of health care access, systemic racism, lack of culturally competent care)
4. **Environmental factors** (ex/toxin exposure, climate change effects)

Establishing dedicated teams to investigate maternal-related death cases will help tackle these issues and highlight the increased prevalence in Black communities.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR HEALTHCARE PROVIDERS

1. Address **implicit bias** and establish training for **culturally safe and unbiased care** throughout all stages of pregnancy
2. Improve awareness and education on health inequities in marginalized groups and their **root causes**
3. Hold authorities accountable for improving comprehensive **Canadian** research on health disparities and gaps in Black maternal health
4. Develop **community partnerships** and hospital programs to increase access to maternal health for all women & implement standardized protocols for care
5. Acknowledge and listen to **lived experiences** of black women and ask questions to better understand concerns
6. Prioritize **earlier** screening and prompt treatment of conditions that may arise during pregnancy or postpartum for at-risk patients
7. Educate **all** patients during pregnancy and postpartum periods on risk factors, urgent warning signs and when to seek immediate care
8. Develop a **national system** to track maternal morbidity and mortality in Canada so that important changes can be made

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