



March of Dimes Foundation  
Wisconsin Market  
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## **WI Board of Directors**

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May 4, 2022

The March of Dimes is the nation's leader in maternal and infant health and strongly supports states' work to extend Medicaid coverage during the postpartum period to 12 months, thereby ensuring that mothers retain health insurance during a crucial window. If full, 12-month Medicaid extension occurs in Wisconsin, the state will join a growing bipartisan list of states that are prioritizing the life and health of new mothers and their infants by extending postpartum Medicaid. March of Dimes does not support the current proposed 90-day extension plan up for federal approval; 12 month extension of Medicaid is a more adequate plan to protect mothers and families in Wisconsin.

The empirical facts are stark and unsettling: Women giving birth in the United States are twice as likely to die due to pregnancy related conditions than as women in Canada, and five times likely as women in Germany. In fact, among developed countries, the U.S. has the greatest maternal mortality rate and is the only country where that rate is increasing.

As part of this national crisis, Wisconsin is facing its own objectionable maternal mortality emergency, with the number of maternal deaths in Wisconsin rising over the past 10 years. What is especially alarming is that maternal mortality for non-Hispanic Black mothers is five times the rate for non-Hispanic White mothers – one of the worst statistics in the nation. There are geographic disparities too. When controlled for sociodemographic factors, women living in rural areas face a 9% greater chance of severe maternal morbidity and mortality than urban residents do.

More than half of all maternal deaths in the U.S. occur over 60 days after birth and more than 60% are preventable. Babies born in Wisconsin to women enrolled in Medicaid have health insurance coverage for 12 months, but the new mother can lose her health insurance coverage as soon as 90 days, with this waiver, after delivery, causing many women to become uninsured shortly after giving birth. While some women can successfully transition to other sources of coverage, many are left in the unsafe position of being uninsured shortly after a major medical event. Disruptions in health coverage are associated with adverse health consequences. This is especially true for women in their childbearing years, when a pregnancy means additional medical risks and medical needs. The stakes are high as the care a woman receives during pregnancy and during the postpartum period is critical to the woman's own health, as well as to the health of her newborn. This is why it is important that this 90 day extension is denied and a 12 month extension plan is adopted by Wisconsin Medicaid.

Postpartum care encompasses a range of important health needs; including recovery from childbirth, follow up on pregnancy complications, management of chronic health conditions, access to family planning and addressing mental health conditions. The stress of pregnancy may bring on newly diagnosed conditions such as diabetes, hypertension, thyroid disorders, renal disease and significant cardiac conditions that need ongoing medical care. In addition, mental health conditions such as postpartum depression and substance use disorder require ongoing treatment. Yet despite knowing how essential and timely postpartum care is, it is estimated that 11.5% of new mothers lacked health insurance coverage and 20% of uninsured new mothers skipped care because of cost; half worried about not being able to afford medical bills. 90 days of coverage may still not be enough to allow postpartum women to receive the care they desperately need. 12-month Medicaid extension would allow women more time to ensure postpartum care and allow women a longer period to transition to additional healthcare insurance.

It is not just the mothers who are affected when their health needs are not met. There is strong evidence that when well-being is disrupted on either side of the relationship it affects both mother and baby. For example, research studies show that babies whose mothers are depressed show poorer socioemotional and cognitive development, which can affect the infant's growth through toddlerhood, preschool and into the school-aged years. It is not uncommon for healthcare providers working with babies in the neonatal intensive care unit or pediatrician office to be frantically problem solving around the mother's lack of insurance coverage because of the profound impact it has on their baby's health and care.

Under the budget passed in 2021, the Department of Health Services is directed to seek federal approval for a state plan amendment or waiver to extend eligibility to the last day of the month that contains the 90<sup>th</sup> day following the end of the pregnancy. Eligibility would only be extended if federal approval is granted through the section 1115 waiver. The American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 changed federal Medicaid law to allow states the option on an ongoing basis to extend post-pregnancy coverage to 365 days through a state plan amendment, which would not need federal approval like the section 1115 waiver. The current 1115 waiver request is not recommended by March of Dimes and it should not be supported by the state of Wisconsin as it is not what is recommended federally.

It is projected that extending post-pregnancy coverage to the one year following the end of a pregnancy would increase average monthly Medicaid enrollment by 6150 members and these members qualifying for the extended eligibility are projected to incur costs of approximately \$354 per month on average. The total annualized cost of this increased enrollment is projected to be \$26.1 million with federal refund eligibility. The budget act that extended additional 30 days to 90 days of postpartum coverage is not eligible for any federal funding if it is approved.

As an organization on the front line, March of Dimes sees the societal impact of persistent health disparities for far too many babies and new mothers in Wisconsin.



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Fortunately, our lawmakers and agencies can take action to address these disparities by denying Wisconsin's request to extend Medicaid to 90 days postpartum and recommend Medicaid extension to 12 months instead. Wisconsin can follow many other states and extend Medicaid coverage to 12 months for new mothers. When women have access to care, they are healthier, their babies are healthier and health care costs go down. March of Dimes enthusiastically embraces all work - like Medicaid extension 12 months postpartum - to help support healthy moms and strong babies.

Sincerely,

Emily Kittell (Maternal and Infant Health Initiatives Manager) and the March of Dimes Wisconsin Board of Directors