

# Addressing Maternal Mortality

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## Executive statement

Maternal mortality, the tragic loss of a woman's life during pregnancy or within one year of childbirth, remains a significant public health concern in Bernalillo County. Despite advancements in healthcare, maternal mortality rates persist, disproportionately affecting marginalized communities. This policy brief outlines the current landscape of maternal mortality in Bernalillo County and offers actionable recommendations to improve maternal health outcomes and save lives.

## Background

Maternal mortality refers to the death of a woman during pregnancy, childbirth, or within one year postpartum, from any cause related to or aggravated by pregnancy or its management (CDC, 2021). In Bernalillo County, maternal mortality rates have remained alarmingly high, reflecting broader disparities in maternal health outcomes. Factors contributing to maternal mortality include inadequate access to prenatal care, underlying health conditions, socioeconomic disparities, systemic racism, and inadequate healthcare infrastructure.

According to the New Mexico Department of Health, Bernalillo County has experienced a maternal mortality rate of 76.85 deaths per 100,000 live births from 2015-2020, surpassing both state and national averages. Black and Indigenous women are disproportionately affected, experiencing maternal mortality rates significantly higher than white women. Additionally, socioeconomic factors such as poverty, lack of health insurance, and limited access to quality healthcare contribute to disparities in maternal mortality rates within the county. The NMDOH also reports that "mental health conditions, especially substance use disorders, remain the most significant contributing factors to maternal mortality." (New Mexico Department of Health, 2023)

## Recommendations

### **Recommendation 1: Expand Access to Prenatal Care**

Increase funding for community health centers and clinics in underserved areas of Bernalillo County to provide comprehensive prenatal care services.

Implement initiatives to reduce barriers to prenatal care, such as transportation assistance, language interpretation services, and flexible scheduling options.

Strengthen partnerships between healthcare providers and community organizations to promote prenatal education and outreach programs targeting vulnerable populations.

### **Recommendation 2: Address Socioeconomic Disparities**

Advocate for policies that support living wage initiatives, affordable housing programs, and access to nutritional assistance for pregnant individuals and families.

### **Recommendation 3: Enhance Cultural Competency in Healthcare:**

Implement cultural competency training programs for healthcare providers to address implicit biases and improve communication with diverse patient populations.

### **Recommendation 4: Implement Maternal Mortality Review Committees:**

Ensure transparency and accountability by disseminating findings and recommendations from maternal mortality reviews to healthcare providers, policymakers, and community stakeholders.

### **Recommendation 5: Invest in Mental Health Support Services:**

Allocate resources to expand access to perinatal mental health services, including screening, counseling, and support groups for pregnant and postpartum individuals experiencing mental health challenges.