



Executive Statement

Maternal mortality in Bernalillo County remains a critical issue, disproportionately affecting marginalized communities, despite previous interventions. This brief aims to highlight urgent strategies for expanding healthcare access, improving provider availability, and integrating substance use treatment to reduce maternal mortality rates effectively.

Background

Maternal mortality is defined as the death of a woman during pregnancy, childbirth, or within one year postpartum due to causes related to pregnancy or its management (CDC, 2021). Bernalillo County continues to face elevated maternal mortality rates that surpass both state and national averages, particularly among Black and Indigenous women. The New Mexico Department of Health (NMDOH) reported a maternal mortality rate of 76.85 deaths per 100,000 live births from 2015-2020, significantly higher than the national average (NMDOH, 2023). This disparity is primarily driven by systemic issues such as inadequate access to prenatal care, socioeconomic inequities, racial discrimination, and provider shortages in healthcare services. Substance use disorders (SUDs) are a leading cause of maternal deaths in Bernalillo County, accounting for over half of maternal fatalities statewide (SourceNM, 2023). Pregnant and postpartum women struggling with SUDs often encounter insufficient support, highlighting the need for integrated treatment options within prenatal and postpartum care settings. Furthermore, workforce shortages in local clinics exacerbate access challenges for women seeking maternal care (NMDOH, 2023). Addressing these challenges requires strategic investments in healthcare infrastructure, provider incentives, and culturally competent training programs to ensure accessible and equitable maternal healthcare services.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Focus Healthcare Access Expansion in High-Priority Areas

Allocate resources to establish new community health centers in the South Valley and International District, where maternal mortality rates and healthcare access barriers are most severe (NMDOH, 2023). Investing in these areas will directly address service gaps and improve outcomes.

Recommendation 2: Incentivize Healthcare Providers for Underserved Areas

Develop loan repayment programs, competitive salaries, and partnerships with medical schools to attract healthcare professionals to clinics facing shortages. Addressing these shortages, as seen with First Choice clinics, will ensure consistent and accessible maternal care.

Recommendation 3: Integrate Substance Use Disorder (SUD) Services into Maternal Care

Increase funding for SUD treatment within prenatal and postpartum care, as SUDs account for over half of maternal deaths in New Mexico. Integrating these services into maternal healthcare settings will provide necessary support for women at risk.

Recommendation 4: Expand Cultural Competency Training Programs

Partner with larger healthcare organizations to offer CEU-accredited cultural competency training for smaller providers through the City of Albuquerque. This will equip all healthcare workers with the skills to deliver culturally appropriate care, improving maternal health outcomes.

Recommendation 5: Enhance Data Monitoring and Evaluation

Utilize PRAMS and local monitoring systems to gather comprehensive data on maternal health trends in Bernalillo County, allowing for targeted, data-driven interventions. Enhanced data collection ensures efficient allocation of resources to reduce maternal mortality.

References:

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2021). Maternal mortality. Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/reproductivehealth/maternal-mortality/index.html>
- New Mexico Department of Health. (2023). Maternal mortality rates and contributing factors in New Mexico: NMDOH Annual Report. New Mexico Department of Health.
- SourceNM. (2023, December 4). NM far above the national maternal death rate. Retrieved from <https://sourcenm.com/2023/12/04/nm-far-above-the-national-maternal-death-rate/>