

April 13, 2026 Women & Children's Health Committee Zoom Meeting

Meeting summary

Quick recap

The Women and Children's Health Committee of MAPOC held a monthly meeting to discuss maternal health equity, with representatives from the Connecticut Health Foundation presenting their maternal health equity blueprint. Tiffany Donelson, President and CEO of the Connecticut Health Foundation, and her team outlined a comprehensive plan addressing five priority areas: treating inequities in severe maternal morbidity, ensuring access to diverse maternal health care providers, strengthening connections between maternal and behavioral health, addressing discrimination in healthcare and diversifying the workforce, and increasing economic security. The presentation highlighted Connecticut's poor ranking (37th) in maternal morbidity despite ranking well in mortality, with Black women experiencing twice the severe maternal morbidity rates compared to their peers. Following the presentation, Abbi Shirk from ICAN provided an update on the HUSKY Family Planning benefit, reporting that enrollment had increased significantly to 556 people in March after DSS implemented a new process for enrollment through Access Health CT portal.

Next steps

- [Ellen Carter/CT Health Foundation: Analyze current activities in Connecticut against the maternal health blueprint to identify alignment, gaps, and ownership opportunities; map who is doing what and where there are gaps; work with a consultant and team from North Carolina to reconvene stakeholders for implementation planning; aim to have a map of leads and next steps by end of year.](#)
- [Ellen/CT Health Foundation: Develop and implement a grant-making strategy to support the maternal health blueprint, focusing on areas where CT Health Foundation funding can have the biggest impact and be additive to existing funding.](#)
- [Ellen: Share in the chat \(and/or provide to interested parties\) the one-pager on what's needed to fund and sustain community health worker \(CHW\) positions in Connecticut, including information from the active CHW coalition.](#)
- [Abbi Shirk\(ICAN\): Share updated one-pager about HUSKY Family Planning coverage and enrollment process \(including Access Health CT pathway\) with David to distribute to the group.](#)
- [Co-Chair Rep. Sarah Keitt: Circulate the HUSKY Family Planning one-pager to newsletter subscribers and networks, including both potential applicants and providers.](#)

Summary

Maternal Health Blue Plan Presentation

The meeting began with introductions and technical preparations for a live broadcast on CT-N. Representative Sarah Keitt and Amy Gagliardi opened the monthly meeting of the Women and

Children's Health Committee of MAPOC, welcoming guests from the CT Health Foundation, including Ellen Carter, Tiffany Donelson, Ariel Levin Becker, and Sabrina Selk. The meeting was focused on a presentation about maternal health, specifically the Maternal Health Blue Plan, which aims to address maternal morbidity rather than mortality. The session was set to begin with Tiffany Donelson providing the main presentation, followed by questions and discussion.

Maternal Health Equity Blueprint Presentation

Tiffany Donelson, President and CEO of the Connecticut Health Foundation, presented the foundation's maternal health equity blueprint to Rep. Kitt and Amy. She explained that while Connecticut ranks highly for overall health, it performs poorly in health equity, particularly for people of color. The blueprint, developed with input from 16 advisors including state commissioners and healthcare providers, aims to address maternal morbidity by focusing on five key areas: raising awareness of maternal health inequalities, ensuring appropriate care teams, strengthening links between maternal and behavioral health, addressing workforce diversity, and increasing economic security for pregnant individuals. The foundation worked with Yale Global Health Leadership Institute and Yale Equity Research and Innovation Center to create evidence-backed interventions with defined action steps and first-year milestones.

Maternal Health Blueprint Priorities

Arielle presented key priorities from a maternal health blueprint, focusing on treating severe maternal morbidity as a public health issue, ensuring access to maternal health care providers, and addressing connections between maternal and behavioral health. The discussion highlighted recommendations for establishing a Severe Maternal Morbidity Review Committee, implementing financing reforms for team-based care including doulas and community health workers, and addressing mental health needs during pregnancy and postpartum. Arielle also noted that discrimination played a significant role in maternal mortality, being implicated in 70% of deaths studied between 2018 and 2020.

Black Maternal Health Implementation Strategy

The meeting focused on addressing Black maternal morbidity in Connecticut, with Arielle presenting key recommendations from a blueprint including increasing diversity in healthcare workforces, implementing evidence-based training to reduce bias, and measuring discrimination through anonymous reporting and race/ethnicity-disaggregated metrics. Ellen discussed current implementation efforts, including a maternal health innovation grant from the Department of Public Health and ongoing work with various committees to address data collection, perinatal mental health care, and doula-friendly practices. The team is working with a North Carolina consultant to create a map of ownership and implementation for different blueprint components by the end of the year, while also developing a grant-making strategy to complement existing state funding.

Maternal Health Provider Accountability Initiatives

The meeting focused on discussing maternal health initiatives and provider accountability. Co-Chair Amy Gagliardi shared insights about closing the accountability loop with providers, using blood pressure cuff ordering as an example, and emphasized the importance of evidence-based trainings on implicit bias. The discussion highlighted the need for tracking and providing feedback to providers to ensure proper implementation of maternal health policies and access to necessary care.

Connecticut Perinatal Care Feedback

Kai Tao provided feedback on the presentation about Connecticut's perinatal care work, highlighting key challenges around access and coverage. She emphasized the importance of improving communication between providers and patients regarding coverage details, particularly for postpartum care at 12 months. Kai Tao also discussed the need for better interoperability between different healthcare providers and suggested that Connecticut could consider using the family planning program as a safety net to maintain continuity of care and address perinatal disparities.

Prenatal Care Guide Development

The team discussed creating a "what to expect when expecting benefits" guide covering primary care, prenatal care, postpartum care, and follow-up iterations. Amy emphasized the importance of service acceptability alongside access, noting that people may only attend 1-3 visits if they don't find services effective. Tiffany agreed with the guide concept and highlighted the need for cultural humility in care delivery, emphasizing co-creation with those most impacted by the programs. The team also noted their ongoing partnership with Rep. Kai Belton and their work with legislators in implementing these initiatives.

CHW Sustainability in Connecticut

The meeting focused on discussing community health workers (CHWs) and their sustainability in Connecticut. Ellen shared information about an active coalition working to ensure sustainable funding for CHWs, noting that many grant-funded positions have disappeared in recent months. The coalition includes organizations like the Connecticut FQHC Association and CAFCA, and Ellen offered to share a one-pager with details on funding needs. Amy mentioned that there would be a second presentation about the Connecticut HUSKY Limited family planning benefit, and she expressed gratitude for the Connecticut Health Foundation's work in bringing together various stakeholders working in the health sector.

Husky Family Planning Program Update

Abbi Shirk from ICAN provided an update on the HUSKY Family Planning program, announcing that DSS has made it possible for eligible individuals to be manually enrolled through the Access Health CT portal, resulting in 556 enrollments in March compared to around 150 monthly previously. Kai

Tao clarified that the program offers comprehensive coverage including annual exams, STI testing, and vasectomies, not just family planning services. The group discussed strategies for reaching more people about the program, with Rep requesting a one-pager to share through their newsletter, and Elizabeth Garrigan (Carelton) confirmed that Shelly Nolan from DMHAS will present an overview of women's services at the next meeting on May 11th.

Abbi Shirk ICAN

I know HES has also been working on supporting Medicaid coverage of CHWs as well <https://hesct.org/>

Ellen Carter CT Health

For more information about the coalition: <https://www.chcact.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/CHW-Advocacy-Coalition-Flyer.pdf>



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1-pager_ April 2026