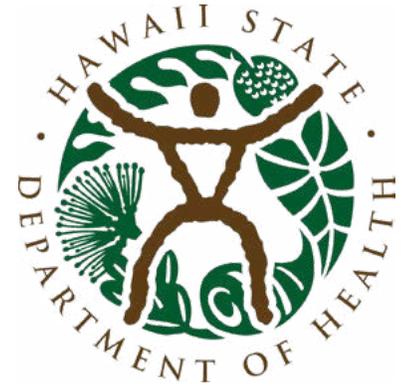


# PROTECTING MOTHERS IN HAWAI'I

## FINDINGS & INSIGHTS FROM THE HAWAI'I MATERNAL MORTALITY REVIEW COMMITTEE



Each year in Hawai'i, 10 to 12 women die from causes related to pregnancy. Every maternal death is a tragedy, and most maternal deaths could be prevented. The Hawai'i Maternal Mortality Review Committee exists to ensure these stories are not forgotten, to learn from them to prevent future deaths, and to keep pregnant mothers safe.

### WHAT IS THE MMRC?

A Maternal Mortality Review Committee (MMRC) is a team of experts who come together to understand why people die during pregnancy or within one year after giving birth. The Hawai'i committee includes: obstetricians; gynecologists; midwives; nurses; mental health and substance use professionals; hospitals from across the state; and community organizations like Healthy Mothers, Healthy Babies and Papa Ola Lōkahi.

#### THE HAWAI'I MMRC:

**IDENTIFIES** deaths that occurred during or in the year after pregnancy

**REVIEWS** medical and social records

**DETERMINES** if the death was related to pregnancy and if it was preventable

**RECOMMENDS** changes to improve care and save lives

EACH LIFE LOST IS A STORY INTERRUPTED – AND A CALL TO LISTEN, UNDERSTAND, AND ACT.

### WHAT IS A PREGNANCY-RELATED DEATH?

#### Pregnancy-Associated Death:

Death during pregnancy or within one year of the end of pregnancy, from any cause.

#### Pregnancy-Related Death:

Death caused by or made worse by pregnancy or its care.

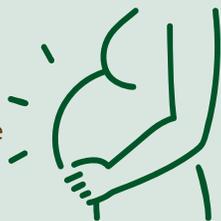
#### Preventable Death:

A death that could have been avoided with better care, support, or systems.

### WHAT THE MMRC FOUND IN HAWAI'I (2015-2022)

**79** PREGNANCY-ASSOCIATED DEATHS were reviewed.

Of these, **37** DEATHS were found to be PREGNANCY RELATED.



Nearly **90%** WERE PREVENTABLE.

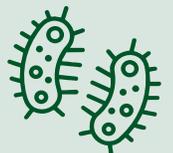
Most deaths occurred **AFTER PREGNANCY and DELIVERY**, especially between **6 WEEKS and 1 YEAR POSTPARTUM**.

**MENTAL HEALTH CONDITIONS** (e.g., depression, substance-use) were the most common known cause.



**HEART-RELATED and CARDIOVASCULAR CONDITIONS** were also a major contributor.

Other causes included **INFECTION, SEVERE BLEEDING, CANCER, and INJURY.**



# RACIAL AND ETHNIC DISPARITIES IN MATERNAL DEATHS

In Hawai'i, most pregnancy-related deaths occurred among non-White people, with Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander, and Asian communities making up the largest groups affected. Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander communities, in particular, experienced maternal deaths at a higher rate than their share of the general population.



## THE COMMITTEE FOUND THAT:

- Discrimination and bias in healthcare settings contributed to some deaths.
- Mental health and substance use issues were often missed or untreated.
- Postpartum care was delayed or incomplete.
- Rural and underserved areas lacked access to needed services.

**Improving maternal health in Hawai'i means addressing not just medical care, but also the social and systemic barriers that affect minorities.**

## COULD THESE DEATHS HAVE BEEN PREVENTED?

**Yes—most of them.** The committee found that nearly 9 out of 10 deaths could have been prevented with better care, stronger systems, and timely support.



## WHAT YOU CAN DO TO PROTECT MOTHERS IN HAWAI'I — YOUR CALL TO ACTION:



### Providers & Hospitals

- Screen for mental health and substance use during and after pregnancy.
- Improve discharge planning and connect patients to community resources.
- Use safety protocols for bleeding, high blood pressure, and heart conditions (e.g., *Alliance for Innovation on Maternal Health (AIM) bundles*).
- Provide implicit bias training and respectful maternity care.
- Offer smoking cessation and family planning services.



### Public Health Leaders & Policymakers

- Expand treatment programs for substance use and mental health.
- Improve transportation and access to prenatal/postpartum care.
- Fund case management and care coordination, especially between obstetric and medication-assisted treatment (MAT) providers.
- Promote trauma-informed care and culturally appropriate services.
- Improve awareness of environmental and other hazards, such as firearms and natural disaster risks for pregnant people.



### Communities & Families

- Learn the warning signs of pregnancy complications and mental health struggles.
- Support loved ones during pregnancy and after birth – especially in the first year.
- Help connect families to local programs, support groups, and health services.
- Advocate for safe, respectful, and equitable care in your community.
- Share stories, raise awareness, and help reduce stigma around mental health.

