

2020 Black Maternal Health Caucus Stakeholder Summit

On July 27, 2020, Patrice A. Harris, MD, MA, immediate past President of the AMA, participated in the 2nd annual Black Maternal Health Caucus (BMHC) Stakeholder Summit hosted by Caucus co-chairs Reps. Lauren Underwood (D-IL) and Alma Adams (D-NC). The Caucus has over 100 House members and its mission is to eliminate health disparities and in particular address the Black maternal health crisis in the U.S. Dr. Harris' comments during the Summit are provided below.

The AMA, the largest professional organization for physicians, is committed to tackling the issues surrounding maternal mortality and morbidity head on. The U.S. is one of only three countries in the world where the rate of maternal deaths is rising. Moreover, there is a large, and largely avoidable, racial disparity in maternal deaths: a recent CDC report found that Black women are 3-4 times more likely to die from pregnancy-related causes than White women. This increasing rate of maternal mortality, which disproportionately harms our country's Black communities, is extremely concerning and exists at the intersection of racial and gender discrimination.

The AMA understands that there are a multitude of considerations necessary to address this epidemic including a lack of insurance or inadequate coverage prior to, during, and after pregnancy, closures of maternity units in many rural and urban communities, and a lack of inter-professional teams trained in best practices. Long standing public policies, laws and racism that produce inequities in the social determinants of health, such as education, employment, housing and transportation, extreme stress exacerbated by discrimination that can result in hypertension, heart disease and gestational diabetes during pregnancy are also all contributing factors, including physicians not listening to their Black female patients, resulting in missed warning signs and delays in diagnoses.

There are concrete actions that should be taken to reduce and prevent rising rates of maternal mortality and serious or near-fatal maternal morbidity in the United States. We urge policy makers to expand the efforts of Maternal Mortality Review Committees, implement equitable standardized data collection methods, expand access to medical and mental health care and social services for post-partum women, expand Medicaid and CHIP coverage to 12-months post-partum, continue to develop a health care workforce that is diverse in background and experience, address shortcomings in our institutions and adopt standards to ensure respectful, safe, and quality care before, during, and after delivery. The AMA is committed to working with Congress on legislative efforts, the Administration on policies, and internally with Dr. Aletha Maybank in collaboration with our new Center for Health Equity (CHE) to address this crisis.

It will take all of us working in partnership – and the AMA is committed to doing so – to build and continue on a path forward to more holistically and effectively improve maternal health and advance health equity. The AMA looks forward to working together to develop and implement solutions for improving maternal health and advance health equity.