



4/28/2024

The Department of State Health Services  
1100 W 49th St, Austin, TX 78756

*Submitted via email to DSHSPublicHearings@dshs.texas.gov*

## 2024 DSHS Legislative Appropriations Request

Dear DSHS Leaders,

Thank you for this opportunity to provide feedback on the Legislative Appropriations Request (LAR) for the 89th Session.

Texans Care for Children is dedicated to improving the health and well-being of Texas families by ensuring access to preventive healthcare for moms and babies. Access to these services throughout a woman's reproductive years—including health screenings and contraception—contributes to healthy, planned pregnancies and early detection and treatment of cancers and other chronic conditions. In alignment with our mission, we recommend the following for the LAR.

## Recommendations

### *Recommend increased funding to strengthen and expand the Texas AIM initiative to prevent maternal illness and death*

The Department of State Health Services (DSHS) partners with the Alliance for Innovation on Maternal Health (AIM) to implement the TexasAIM Program. TexasAIM supports the birthing hospitals in Texas that volunteer to incorporate patient safety bundles that include technical assistance and collaborative learning. The bundle is a package of best practices and protocols to address a specific condition in pregnancy.

The combination of best practices, multidisciplinary teams, simulations, and technical support from the agency has led to the vast majority of birthing hospitals in Texas adopting the postpartum hemorrhage bundle. As Texas continues to see increased morbidity and mortality among pregnant and postpartum women, we strongly recommend that the state increase its investment in this program. Additional funding would make it possible to roll out the Substance Use pilot statewide, adopt and implement the Sepsis and Cardiac bundles, and support

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Texans Care for Children is a statewide, non-profit, non-partisan, multi-issue children's policy organization. We drive policy change to improve the lives of Texas children today for a stronger Texas tomorrow. We envision a Texas in which all children grow up to be healthy, safe, successful, and on a path to fulfill their promise.

evaluation and simulation training components vital to these practices' sustainable success and developing institutional knowledge.

***Recommend funding efforts to combat the unprecedented spread of congenital syphilis in Texas***

In 2022, Texas reported almost 922 cases of congenital syphilis, in comparison to 73 in 2013, a drastic increase over a 10-year period<sup>1</sup>. Congenital syphilis occurs when a pregnant woman with an untreated illness passes the infection to her baby during pregnancy or delivery. It can cause serious health problems for the baby, including miscarriage, stillbirth, premature birth, or birth defects. It is preventable and treatable with penicillin when caught early enough. Infants in Texas should not be dying or experiencing suffering due to this preventable, curable illness. We encourage DSHS to request funding to support cross-agency efforts to address screening, diagnosis, and treatment of congenital syphilis for pregnant women and babies.

***Recommend restored funding to HPV prevention efforts to prevent cervical and other cancers among Texas women***

We recognize that DSHS has had funding restraints in the Adult Safety Net (ASN) program that caused it to discontinue access to the Human Papillomavirus vaccine in 2023. Preventing HPV, particularly for young women, will go a long way towards the prevention of cervical cancer. Cervical cancer is the fourth most common cancer among women globally and caused an estimated 342,000 deaths in 2020.<sup>2</sup> We strongly urge DSHS to request funding to restore these lifesaving efforts and additional funds to ensure continued access to the HPV vaccine.

***Recommend sustaining transparency in the continued work and data needs of the Maternal Morbidity & Mortality Review Committee (MMMRC) to strengthen the maternal health systems in Texas***

Texas needs accurate, timely, and comprehensive data to craft solutions that meet the needs of mothers and families. We recognize and support the MMMRC and the agency's difficult task regarding collecting, analyzing, reporting, and retaining these sensitive records. Since the MMRC's work is vital for the state and communities serving Texas and babies, it is critical that the MMMRC remains well-funded to continue to do the necessary redaction and data analysis and that the committee's data and findings remain transparent to the public and those serving women. We commend DSHS for prioritizing the MMMRC.

We look forward to the new database implementation that will allow the continued elevation of the data necessary to craft effective interventions that address disparities and protect our Texas moms.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.dshs.texas.gov/sites/default/files/hivstd/info/edmat/CongenitalSyphilisRise.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> World Health Organization. Cervical Cancer Facts. <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/cervical-cancer>