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OPINION

Here's one way to improve maternal mortality rates in Texas

Local organizations are closing the gap between mothers and providers.



By **Dallas Morning News Editorial**

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Client Perla Betancourth holds her daughter Nahia after a ribbon-cutting ceremony at CeCe's Place, a new maternal medical clinic, on Tuesday, Feb. 6, 2024, in Dallas. (Smiley N. Pool / Staff Photographer)



Texas is ranked second-to-last in the nation for maternal health, which accounts for both maternal and infant mortality. Not all deaths are avoidable, but this poor level of health is indefensible.

In fact, more than 80% of these deaths are entirely preventable, according to Nailah Johnson, the senior director of the Texas Home Visiting Program and Maternal Health Initiatives for United Way of Metropolitan Dallas. These numbers demonstrate a systemic failure to meet the maternal health needs of Texan women.

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Thankfully, there are organizations working to remedy this problem — such as United Way of Metropolitan Dallas. As part of the nonprofit's mission to improve access to better health opportunities, United Way partners with Metrocare Services to provide much-needed programs to women throughout Dallas County.

We have previously advocated for the Legislature to tackle [abysmal maternal death rates](#), but women throughout Texas can't wait for the Legislature. The gap in care for women is so severe that the philanthropic community must step in to invest in programs that improve outcomes.

D Opinion

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One of the services that Metrocare offers along with United Way is Flourishing Families, a program that helps close the gap between mothers and health care providers. The program includes up to 10 prenatal or postpartum home visits with registered nurses, nurse supervisors and social workers who can check in and provide necessary referrals and resources to new mothers.

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Johnson told us that there is a desire to expand Flourishing Families and hire more nurses within the areas of Dallas County that have the highest need. But Johnson said that more funding is needed to make this initiative happen.

The results from Flourishing Families are encouraging. United Way reports that 89% of women who participated in the program were screened for intimate-partner violence and depression, and if they needed it, were referred to the proper resources. This connection to follow-up care and support is critical for the well-being of families.

Through Flourishing Families, mothers also have access to Help Me Grow North Texas, an initiative that connects moms with services concerning housing assistance, mental health and primary care across the greater Dallas-Fort Worth area.

These services are intended to reduce anxiety and depression, prevent child abuse and neglect, and deter prenatal- and postpartum-related emergency-room visits.

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Services like these are vital, and they can save women and babies from harm and even death.

Texas should be ashamed of its outcomes for mothers. Turning it around will take ongoing effort from every corner.

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