The health of a community begins with its children. If we want to predict the health and prosperity of any community – and our state – we might simply begin by asking, “How are the children?” The health and well-being of Delaware’s children have shown progress over the past 25 years, but there is still progress to be made. Every child in Delaware should have the opportunity to begin life with a strong foundation of good health, with access to quality care and health food, and on a path to success.
In 2004, the Annie E. Casey Foundation ranked Delaware as having the worst infant mortality rate in the nation. Understanding the implications of an infant mortality rate of 10.7 per 1,000 women, many groups throughout the state took action. KIDS COUNT in Delaware convened a meeting of statewide stakeholders, in addition to engaging local media and residents in the concern over this issue. Governor Minner established the Infant Mortality Task Force, charged with generating specific recommendations for reducing the state’s infant mortality rate.

Close to $6 million was allocated through fiscal year 2008 based on recommendations from the task force. This level of funding was a tangible display of the state’s commitment to making real change because it came at a time when the state’s budget was beginning to contract – at time when a hiring freeze went into effect and agencies statewide were being asked to “give back” a percentage of their funding. Nearly $18 million was allocated to strategies detailed in the infant mortality task force recommendations before Delaware’s trend line data first began to show results in 2009 with a decrease in the state’s infant mortality rate.

Why Does it Matter?

Nationally, the leading causes of infant mortality are birth defects, preterm or low birthweight births, Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) and issues related to pregnancy and birth, including maternal complications and unintentional injuries.

The infant mortality rate measures the number of infant deaths within the first year of life from all causes and is often used as an indicator of overall maternal and child health in Delaware.
the state. Furthermore, disparities in infant mortality by race/ethnicity and socioeconomic status are a measure of the inequities that exist within communities.

**Next Steps**

Today, the work continues—Delaware's infant mortality rate remains higher than the national rate and the state continues to have a dramatic racial and ethnic disparity in this measure. A closer examination of the data shows that infant mortality rates are higher than average for infants born pre-term, as well as to mothers who had received no prenatal care, were under 20, did not complete high school, were unmarried or were smokers. Given the complexities of the causes of low birthweight and infant mortality, it will take a multifaceted approach to address the biological, social and environmental determinants including maternal health and wellness. The Delaware Healthy Mothers and Infants Consortium remains a powerful voice and force—advocating for targeted strategies—in the fight to further reduce infant mortality in Delaware.

**INFANT MORTALITY TIMELINE**

- **RATE**
  - Delaware's infant mortality rate begins to increase while the national trend is decreasing

- **RANKING**
  - Delaware ranks LAST in nation for infant mortality in the Annie E. Casey Foundation's KIDS COUNT Data Book; Governor breaks Data Book's press embargo to lay out a plan for addressing infant mortality in Delaware, including the creation of an Infant Mortality Task Force

- **BUDGET**
  - Delaware's state budget includes $1 million in new funding to support key task force recommendations; legislation passes to create Healthy Mothers and Infants Consortium as successor to the task force; legislation passes to generate funding for a comprehensive Fetal Infant Death Review Board

- **TASK FORCE**
  - Infant Mortality Task Force issues a 3-year plan with 20 recommendations

- **TREND**
  - Delaware's infant mortality rate trend line decreases for first time since work began

- **GOALS**
  - Reduce health disparities—infant mortality specifically—by addressing social determinants of health
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The photographs in this data snapshot do not necessarily represent the situations described.

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