



May 2025

Maternal Health & Birth Equity Summit Stakeholder Conversations Summary



Purchaser Business
Group on Health

Introduction

The United States has the highest rate of maternal mortality and morbidity among developed nations, with nearly [80% of pregnancy-related deaths](#) thought to be preventable. Racial disparities are also evident, as women of color are more likely than white women to die from complications of childbirth.

With over half of births paid for by commercial insurance, public and private employers can play an important role in improving maternal health for the 180 million Americans who receive care coverage through their jobs. However, to truly confront the maternal health crisis in the U.S., all health care purchasers, health plans, providers, patients and government agencies need to be activated and aligned.

Supported by an engagement award from the Patient-Centered Outcomes Research Institute (PCORI), the Purchaser Business Group on Health (PBGH) hosted a multi-stakeholder summit in Denver, Colorado, in September 2024 to discuss opportunities to address maternal health and birth equity. Building upon quality standards and metrics outlined in PBGH's [Comprehensive Maternity Care Common Purchasing Agreement](#), the event also explored the role of patient-centered comparative clinical effectiveness research (CER) in identifying strategies to improve care outcomes.

Opportunities for Action

Through conversations with [PBGH member organizations](#), patient advocates and community stakeholders, several key themes for action were identified following the 2024 Maternal Health & Birth Equity Summit¹:

Patient Education

To be an informed health care consumer, birthing people and their families must be aware of the risks, treatment options and resources available for a healthy pregnancy and delivery. Employers and public purchasers are partnering with their health plans, providers and third-party vendors to provide

timely digital education and services to help patients navigate the health care system from pre-pregnancy through postpartum. Public communication efforts, such as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's [“Hear Her” campaign](#), are also raising awareness of adverse pregnancy outcomes and enabling patients to find their voice.

Doula Support

As demonstrated in current research and an ongoing [PCORI-funded systematic review](#), doulas have been shown to enhance patient experience, decrease unnecessary intervention and reduce birth complications. Employers, public purchasers and some health plans are increasing access to doulas through insurance coverage or benefit reimbursement policies, while also encouraging greater acceptance of doulas among patients and the clinical community.

Care Access

Access to maternity care is decreasing across the country, as maternity care deserts (regions with limited or no maternity care) become increasingly common. In response, employers, public purchasers and health plans are exploring coverage of midwifery care, birth centers and home birth options, as well as expanding telehealth services for pregnancy and postpartum care, which was demonstrated to be an effective modality in a [PCORI rapid review](#).

Data Measurement

Employers and public purchasers are coordinating with their health plans to leverage available [measure sets](#) to evaluate whether workers and families are receiving high-quality and equitable maternity care and to implement appropriate interventions. Facility [safety data](#) is also being used to inform patients of the availability of maternity services and the frequency of unnecessary procedures that may increase risks, while also holding providers and hospitals accountable to improving care outcomes.

¹ This event was partially funded through a Patient-Centered Outcomes Research Institute® (PCORI®) Engagement Award Initiative (#EASCS-34693). The content does not necessarily represent the views of the Patient-Centered Outcomes Research Institute (PCORI).

Maternal Mental Health

Addressed by over one-third of studies included in PCORI's [maternal morbidity and mortality portfolio](#), mental health disorders continue to be a leading cause of adverse pregnancy outcomes and death, including suicide. Acknowledging this challenge, employers and public purchasers are investing in expanded mental health supports through Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) and third-party vendors, helping patients to identify and seek treatment for concerning symptoms. Health plans and providers are also being assessed on the consistency of mental health screenings and follow-up during pregnancy and postpartum care visits.

Postpartum Care

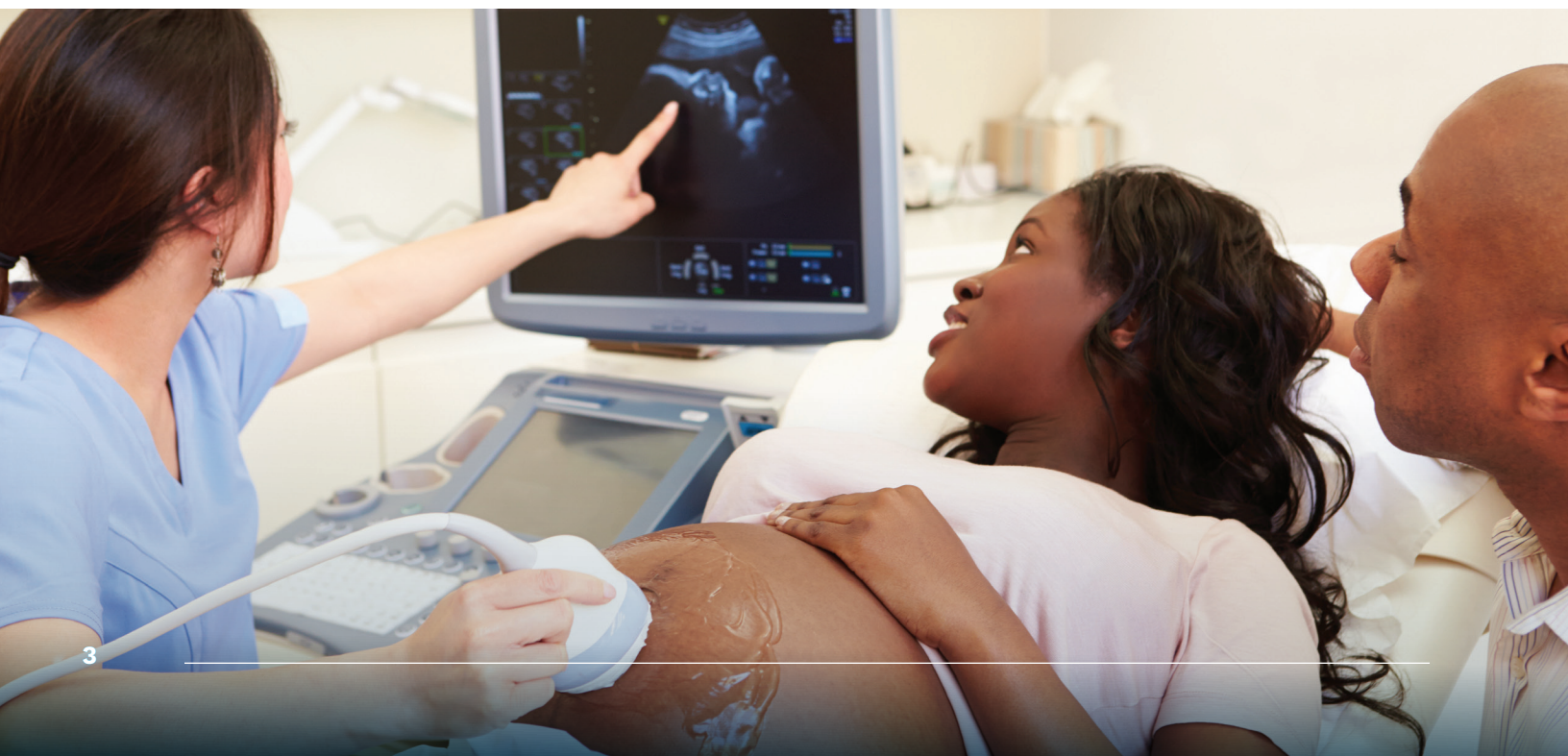
As demonstrated by a [PCORI-funded systematic review](#), maternal health needs during the postpartum period are critically important and vary significantly based on health care coverage. Employers, public purchasers and health plans are improving care coordination through providers, community agencies and third-party vendors to ensure that mothers receive adequate support following birth, as well as pregnancy loss. This includes telehealth services, home visits and face-to-face appointments, as well as the adjustment of leave policies to ensure adequate time away from work for physical and emotional recovery.

Public-Private Collaboration

In all of these conversations, the necessity of alignment among public and private entities could not be overstated. Employers and public purchasers are eager to collaborate with health plans, providers, non-profits, community organizations and government agencies to address maternal health, especially as it relates to social needs and culturally sensitive care. As underscored by PCORI, [partnerships](#) are important in ensuring that research is “patient-centered, relevant and useful.”

Next Steps

Through its membership of employers and public purchasers, PBGH looks forward to continuing to advance the implementation of patient-centered CER and other promising strategies to improve maternal health and birth equity. To learn more about opportunities to get involved in this multi-stakeholder work, please contact Randa Deaton at rdeaton@pbgh.org.



About PBGH

Purchaser Business Group on Health (PBGH) is a nonprofit coalition representing nearly 40 private employers and public entities across the U.S. that collectively spend \$350 billion annually purchasing health care services for more than 21 million Americans and their families. PBGH has a 30-year track record of incubating new, disruptive operational programs in partnership with large employers and other health care purchasers. Our initiatives are designed to test innovative methods and scale successful approaches that lower health care costs and increase quality across the U.S.

About PCORI

The Patient-Centered Outcomes Research Institute® (PCORI®) is an independent, nonprofit organization authorized by federal law in 2010. Its mission is to fund research that will provide patients, their caregivers, and clinicians with the evidence-based information needed to make better informed healthcare decisions. PCORI is committed to continually seeking input from a broad range of stakeholders to guide its work

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