

Black Infant Health Program

# SisterStory

## Angela's Story:

### Lifelong Friends for Mom and Baby

When Angela enrolled in the Black Infant Health (BIH) program over two years ago, she didn't realize the impact it would have on her—and also her unborn baby. She knew BIH was educational and provided maternal and infant support through group sessions during pregnancy and postpartum. Other than that, she wasn't sure what to expect.

"The first day there, I walked in nervous, but I left feeling like I was at home," Angela explains. "I was comfortable; the staff was really easy to talk to and informative. It was a place where we could speak freely in an open forum and not have to worry about being judged."

BIH addresses the problem of poor birth outcomes and health disparities affecting Black women and their infants. For example, Black women are at a higher risk for a number of pregnancy-related issues, including preterm birth, preeclampsia, gestational diabetes, heart attack and stroke. These disparities exist regardless of education or



Angela and her son Jax

socio-economic status, so BIH focuses on increasing Black women's social support, decreasing their stress and empowering them individually and as a community.

Angela had a high-risk pregnancy, which meant she and her baby were at higher-than-normal risk for complications during or after the pregnancy and birth. In BIH, Angela met several other women with high-risk pregnancies—including three who faced similar risks to hers. She found much needed understanding and empathy from the group.

"I was aware that my population was at high risk for lots of things, but I wasn't aware that high-risk pregnancy was so high for African-Americans," Angela says, adding that the group understood each other's fears and immediately bonded.

After Angela's son, Jax, was born healthy and Angela herself sailed through pregnancy and delivery without any major incident, the new mom met even more women in BIH's postpartum group. Her circle of friends—and support—continued to grow at a time when she needed it most: The women she had met in BIH helped her through pregnancy and divorce, and now in her life as a single, first-time mom. Angela and Jax graduated from BIH, but the group continues to see each other often.

"On top of the education offered by BIH, I walked away with the potential to have lifelong friends. We are all still very close, we have a group chat and we talk every single day," she says. "I feel like my son walked away with friends as well."

The three words Angela uses to describe BIH are compassion, understanding and honesty. She says, "I would definitely recommend the program to anyone. It's important that all mothers in general have support, but the fact that we are all African-American mothers going through this was really important."



# Meet the Black Infant Health Program

**Racism and social and economic stressors play an important role in poor birth outcomes—babies born too early and too small—for Black women.**

Black Infant Health (BIH) recognizes the impact of historical racism and how long-term exposure to stress can negatively influence maternal and infant health outcomes, regardless of socioeconomic status. Within a culturally supportive environment, and honoring the unique history of African-American women, BIH aims to help women have healthy babies.

BIH implements an evidence-informed intervention that uses a group-based approach, where participants get to meet, interact and build a sisterhood with other Black women. Group sessions are complemented with participant-centered life planning, goal setting and referrals to services for participants and their families. This powerful combination serves to help women enhance life skills, learn proven strategies to reduce stress and build social support. Ultimately, this two-pronged approach impacts not only participants themselves, but future generations of Black women, infants and families.

**Where We Are:** Services are provided in communities where approximately 90% of African-American births occur:

## Counties

- ▶ Alameda
- ▶ Contra Costa
- ▶ Fresno
- ▶ Kern
- ▶ Los Angeles
- ▶ Riverside
- ▶ Sacramento
- ▶ San Bernardino
- ▶ San Diego
- ▶ San Francisco
- ▶ San Joaquin
- ▶ Santa Clara

## Cities

- ▶ Long Beach
- ▶ Pasadena

**Our Goal:** To improve African-American infant and maternal health, as well as decrease Black-White health inequities and social inequities for women and infants.

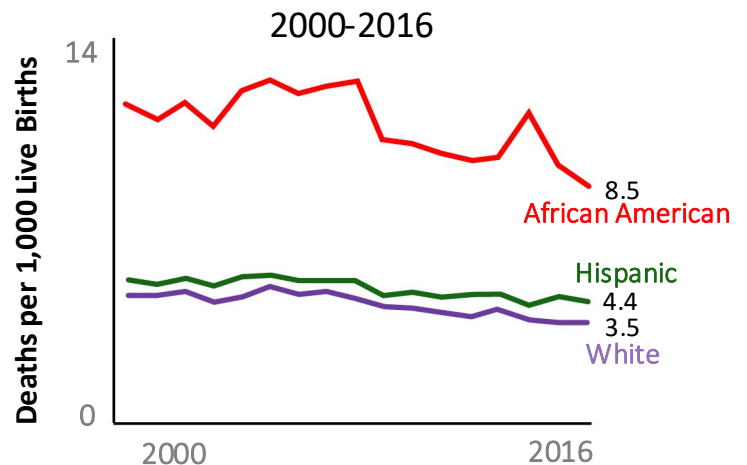
**We Serve:** African-American women who are 18 years or older and up to 30 weeks pregnant at the time of enrollment regardless of income.

**Service Delivery:** Services are free and provided by Family Health Advocates, Group Facilitators, Public Health Nurses and Social Workers.

**Outcomes:** Current science supports an empowerment-focused, group-based intervention as a promising strategy for improving African-American women's birth outcomes. BIH participants report:

- ▶ Stronger positive connections to their heritage and the African-American women in their community
- ▶ Increased empowerment to make behavior changes that lead to living a healthier life
- ▶ Better understanding of effective strategies to manage and reduce stress

## Infant Mortality by Race/Ethnicity



Graphic chart above is a representation of surveillance data. Contact [MCAHDataHelp@cdph.ca.gov](mailto:MCAHDataHelp@cdph.ca.gov) for actual data.

