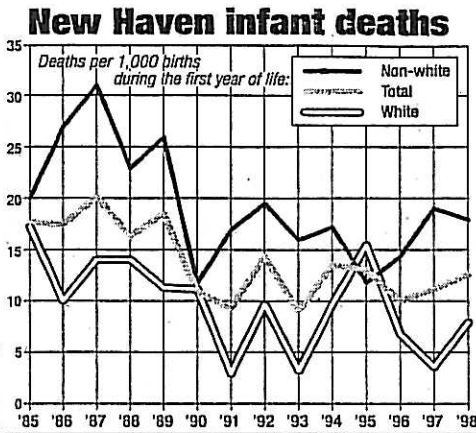


HEALTHY START INITIATIVE: ELIMINATING DISPARITIES COMPETITION

June 1, 2001 – May 31, 2005

NEW HAVEN, CONNECTICUT

EDITORIAL



More infants can be saved

City renews health attack on preventable deaths.

More than a decade after New Haven launched its first all-out effort to improve infant health care, the city is tackling the problem again.

There is good reason to believe that a reinvigorated effort to decrease the number of infant deaths and low birth weight babies can save even more lives than current public health efforts.

Infant mortality and other statistics since 1985 reflect the concentrated five-year effort of the Special Commission on Infant Health Care from 1988 to 1993. When the city and the Community Foundation for Greater New Haven began formulating a strategy to decrease these deaths, some New Haven neighborhoods had infant death rates that outstripped those in impoverished Third World countries.

In 1987, the overall infant death rate was 20.2 deaths per 1,000 births; for minorities, 31 per thousand.

Since the commission ceased its work, the overall infant mortality rate has never exceeded 14.4 per 1,000 births; for minorities it has never gone above 19.6. The drop in the numbers was a result of increased access to health care and a public information campaign that included billboards alerting women to the availability of health care. A clinic opened in the Dixwell neighborhood. The Hospital of St. Raphael started its Mother Care van to visit neighborhoods where there was little access to health care.

But since the early 1990s, there has been no clear, further decrease in infant deaths or low birth weight babies. In Newhallville the death rate 42.3 per thousand births in 1994, 53.7 in 1995.

In 1998, the last year for which statistics are available, New Haven had an overall infant death rate of 12.5 per thousand births, a number that was almost double the overall state death rate.

The city has had slightly lower mortality rates than Bridgeport and Hartford, which have the same intractable problems of poverty that diminish effective health care. To New Haven's credit, no one takes satisfaction in that.

"Is this as good as it gets?" asks Maria Damiani of the city health department. "And our answer is, no way."

The city and the community foundation have again joined, this time with New Haven Healthy Start, to launch a new effort to decrease infant deaths and improve mothers' health. More than 150 public health care professionals gathered recently to discuss solutions.

As a result of this partnership, a new plan of attack is expected. The focus may broaden beyond infants to address even more the health and needs of mothers.

But the fundamental issues of public education, access to health care and poverty remain the same as they did more than a decade ago when the Special Commission on Infant Health was created. Many of the solutions were outlined in the 1993 mission statement of the broader commission that replaced the infant mortality effort.

What may be most encouraging now is the renewed and increased attention of the health care community to infant and maternal health. The lives of more of New Haven's babies can be saved.

Source: New Haven Register Sunday, January 21, 2001 Page B2

COMMUNITY FOUNDATION FOR GREATER NEW HAVEN 70 Audubon Street New Haven, CT 06511

Contact: Kenn Harris, Healthy Start Project Director (203)-777-2386 kharris@cfgnh.org