

MATERNAL AND INFANT HEALTH: BABIES IN THE BUDGET 2025

Maternal mortality rates have declined from their peak during the COVID-19 pandemic, and 49 states and the District of Columbia have now expanded their postpartum Medicaid coverage to 12 months. Despite this good news, the United States still ranks among the highest in maternal and infant mortality rates of all wealthy countries, and these rates vary widely by race. In 2023, the maternal mortality rate for Black women was more than three times the rate of white women, four times the rate of Hispanic women, and nearly five times the rate of Asian women.¹ Between 2021 and 2022, the infant mortality rate **rose 3%, the first increase in 20 years**, and **rates are rising fastest** in states that have implemented abortion bans. Recent years of flat funding for programs that improve rates of maternal and infant mortality, including Healthy Start, Screening and Treatment for Maternal Depression, and Safe Motherhood/Infant Health Programs, amount to a funding decrease in real dollars. The President's proposed Fiscal Year (FY) 2026 budget would deliver further and, in some cases, drastic cuts. Without continued and consistent funding to further reduce rates of infant and maternal mortality, these numbers are likely to increase and children and their families will suffer.

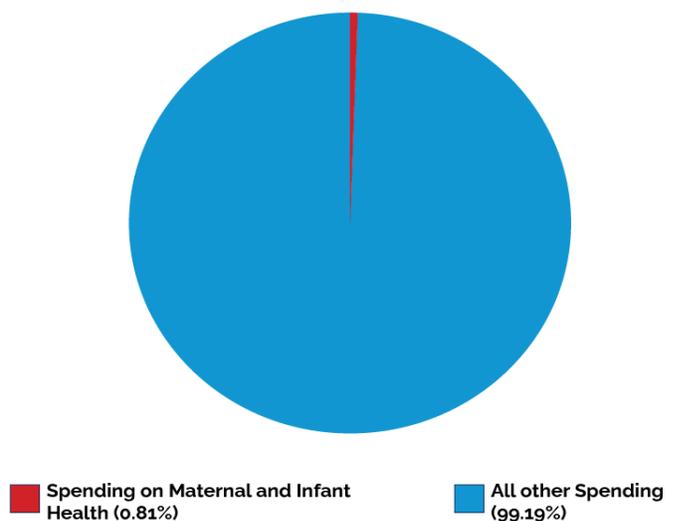
Overall Analysis

The share of federal funding for infant and maternal health experienced a 50% increase between FY 2021 and FY 2025. This number however, is misleading: the vast majority of this increase is due to increased Medicaid spending during that time. While undeniably a positive development for babies, who rely disproportionately on Medicaid, this uptick in spending reflects automatic increases in spending due to factors such as population growth or increased participation rather than policy changes. In fact, Congress has passed, and the President has signed into law, legislation that drastically cuts Medicaid over the next decade. Those cuts will be reflected in future numbers.

Infant and maternal health and well-being programs receive just 0.81% of all federal spending, an amount wholly inadequate to meet the challenges that babies and their mothers face.

Funding for discretionary programs in this portfolio has failed to keep up with inflation. **Of the 19 infant and maternal health and well-being programs tracked in *Babies in the Budget 2025*, 14 sustained cuts in inflation-adjusted dollars in FY 2025.** Of those that received increases, all but one came through the mandatory funding process, which is required to increase over time due to factors such as rising participation rather than reflecting any proactive policy choice by Congress. The only discretionary maternal and infant wellness program

Maternal and Infant Health as Share of Federal Spending, FY 2025



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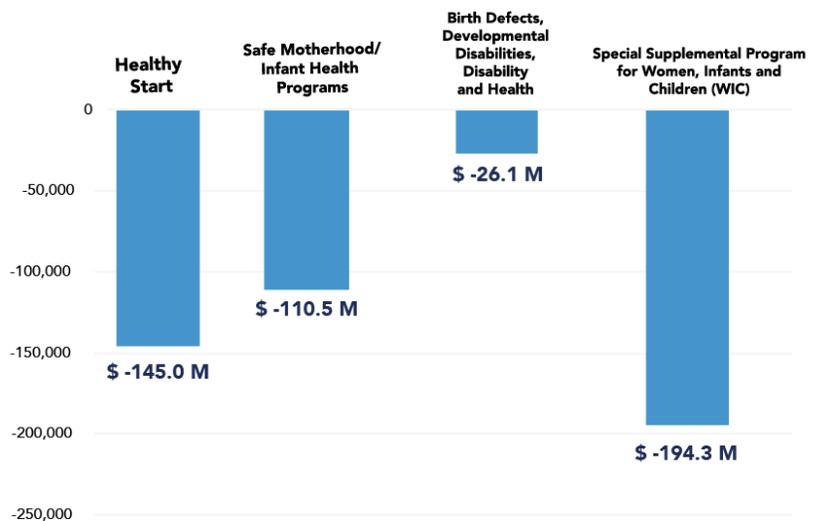
to receive an increase was the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children, better known as WIC. Programs including the Maternal and Child Health Services Block Grant; Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health; Screening and Treatment for Maternal Depression; Adverse Childhood Experiences; Healthy Start; and Safe Motherhood/Infant Health Programs all experienced cuts in real funding in FY 2025.

Overview of the President's FY 2026 Budget

The President's FY 2026 budget proposes significant cuts to programs impacting infant and maternal health, including an 11.27% decrease in discretionary spending. The President's proposal would eliminate funding for Healthy Start, as well as Safe Motherhood/Infant Health Programs, and Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health, totaling cuts of more than \$270 million. Additionally, the President's budget would cut funding for the Maternal and Child Health Services Block Grant as well as WIC. The President's FY 2026 budget proposal would flat-fund Screening and Treatment for Maternal Depression and the Innovation in Maternal Health Program, which would mean cuts to these programs in real dollars.

The Healthy Start program, established in 1991 by President George H. W. Bush as a presidential initiative, improves maternal health and reduces infant deaths in communities with rates of infant mortality at least 1.5 times the national average. The Safe Motherhood/Infant Health Programs support initiatives such as state maternal mortality review committees, the Pregnancy Risk Assessment Monitoring System, the Sudden Unexplained Infant Death Registry, and perinatal quality collaboratives. **At a time when the U.S. infant and maternal mortality rate outstrips those of nearly every other wealthy nation, these programs save lives by building community-based, family-centered initiatives to strengthen maternal and infant health systems in high-risk areas, and collect and track data that is vital to understanding solutions to the nation's maternal and infant mortality crisis.**

Largest Cuts to Maternal and Infant Health in Trump's Proposed FY 2026 Budget



President Trump's proposed FY 2026 budget would cut discretionary spending on maternal and infant health by another 11.27%.

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The President's FY 2026 budget would make significant funding cuts to programs dedicated to treating birth defects and other developmental disorders, totaling an additional \$26.1 million in cuts for children under age 3.

WIC is a critically important program for babies and their mothers, supporting low-income newborns by providing access to healthy foods, formula, and breastfeeding support; nutritional education; and referrals to other services. In recent years, it has also been a legislative flashpoint. The President's FY 2026 budget would slash WIC's funding, and in particular its fruit and vegetable component, depriving an estimated 5 million families of this popular benefit.² Fortunately, the FY 2026 Agriculture appropriations bill rejected this approach and fully funded WIC through FY 2026, including its fruit and vegetable component.

Infant and Maternal Health Programs Tracked in *Babies in the Budget 2025*:

- **Adverse Childhood Experiences**
- **Birth Defects, Developmental Disabilities, Disability and Health**
- **Child Maltreatment**
- **Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP)**
- **Environmental Health Laboratory: Newborn Screening/ Severe Combined Immunodeficiency Diseases**
- **Environmental Health Laboratory: Newborn Screening Quality Assurance Program**
- **Healthy Start**
- **Hospitals Promoting Breastfeeding**
- **Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health**
- **Innovation in Maternal Health Program**
- **Integrated Services for Pregnant and Postpartum Women**
- **Maternal and Child Health Services Block Grant**
- **Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Visiting Program**
- **Medicaid**
- **Safe Motherhood/Infant Health Programs**
- **Screening and Treatment for Maternal Depression**

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- **Special Supplemental Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC)**
- **Universal Newborn Hearing Screening and Early Intervention (Early Hearing Detection and Intervention)**
- **Vaccines For Children**

References

1. Hoyert, D. L. (2023). *Health E-Stat 100: Maternal Mortality Rates in the United States, 2023*. CDC. Retrieved November 7, 2025, from <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/hestat/maternal-mortality/2023/maternal-mortality-rates-2023.htm>
2. Eppes, Elisabet. "Trump Budget Would Slash WIC Fruit and Vegetable Benefits for Millions." June 3, 2025. <https://www.cbpp.org/blog/trump-budget-would-slash-wic-fruit-and-vegetable-benefits-for-millions>