



**RHODE ISLAND KIDS COUNT**  
ONE UNION STATION  
PROVIDENCE, RHODE ISLAND 02903  
401/351-9400 • 401/351-1758 (FAX)

Contact: Katherine Linwood Chu, Communications Manager  
401.351.9400, Ext. 22 / [kchu@rikidscount.org](mailto:kchu@rikidscount.org)

## Rhode Island KIDS COUNT Annual Celebration of Children's Health

*Event celebrates the progress Rhode Island has made in increasing access to high-quality health coverage — Rhode Island is ranked 2<sup>nd</sup> best in the nation for children's health coverage*

*Call to action -- Expand health coverage and reduce racial and ethnic disparities by passing Cover All Kids bill and extending health coverage to 12 months postpartum*

Providence, RI (November 19, 2021) – About 200 community leaders, elected officials, and health care advocates will gather virtually on November 22, 2021 for the **21<sup>st</sup> annual Celebration of Children's Health** to reflect on the progress that Rhode Island has made in achieving positive health outcomes for children — including the fact that Rhode Island is now ranked second best in the nation for children's health coverage – and to recommit to the work that still needs to be done.

### **Covering Kids and Families Awards**

This year, the recipients of the Covering Kids and Families Award are Quatia Osorio and Dr. Nicole Alexander-Scott. Rhode Island KIDS COUNT is pleased to honor **Quatia Osorio** in recognition of her work to address the Black maternal health crisis and improve birth outcomes for families of color. Osorio, a doula, is Founder of Our Journ3i, a perinatal community-led, based wellness center focusing on eliminating health disparities in communities of color through maternal support, education, advocacy, and awareness, Founder and Co-Lead of Umoja Nia Collective, Rhode Island's only Black Doula Collective, & Executive Director of the Urban Perinatal Education Center. Rhode Island KIDS COUNT is also pleased to honor **Dr. Nicole Alexander-Scott**, Director of the Rhode Island Department of Health, for her work to promote health equity through addressing the social and environmental determinants of health - in particular for her work supporting Health Equity Zones, which put the community's voice front and center in designing solutions to create healthier communities, and for her steadfast leadership during the pandemic.

### **Parent Perspectives**

Two parents will share their perspectives on the importance of RIte Care health coverage. One parent will describe how health insurance makes a difference for their family, and the other will speak about why we need to expand this coverage to children who are undocumented so all children have the benefit of this important preventive health coverage to support their physical and mental health and development.

## **Federal and State Perspectives**

Lt. Governor Sabina Matos (representing Governor McKee), Senator Jack Reed, Senator Sheldon Whitehouse, Congressman James Langevin, Congressman David Cicilline, Speaker K. Joseph Shekarchi and Senator Sandra Cano (representing the Senate) will share federal and state perspectives on the progress we have made as a state in increasing access to children's health insurance coverage and opportunities to improve access to health care, improve health outcomes, and eliminate racial and ethnic disparities.

In 2019, 98.1% of Rhode Island children and 94.3% of all U.S. children had health insurance coverage. Rhode Island is ranked the 2<sup>nd</sup> best state in the nation for children's health coverage. The only state that insures a higher percentage of children is Massachusetts.

Only about 5,000 Rhode Island children are uninsured, and 3,000 of these children are income-eligible for RItE Care. **To achieve our goal of covering all kids, we must restore access to RItE Care health insurance for income-eligible children who are residents of the state, regardless of immigration status.**

All children need access to health care that supports their healthy growth and development and promotes school success. It is far more cost effective to provide access to primary, preventive care to undocumented children through the Cover All Kids bill than paying the far higher cost when a health condition that could have been prevented or treated early escalates to an emergency requiring emergency room care that the state pays for.

"Today we have much to celebrate, but we also have work to do to make sure that our progress with health insurance coverage and health outcomes continues," said Elizabeth Burke Bryant, Executive Director of Rhode Island KIDS COUNT. "We need to restore preventive health care coverage through RItE Care to all income-eligible children, regardless of immigration status, and look forward to working with community and state leaders this legislative session to pass the Cover All Kids bill. We are strongly committed to addressing the needs of children and families in Rhode Island with a particular focus on closing racial and ethnic disparities – and this is an achievable, important, right thing to do."

## **Rhode Island's Positive Health Outcomes for Children**

Rhode Island leads the nation in several children's health outcomes:

- Adolescent HPV Vaccination (1st)
- Children's Health Coverage (2nd)
- Child & Teen Deaths (2nd)
- Teen Births (6th)

## Rlte Care's National Excellence

Rlte Care is a Top-Quality Performer in the following areas, according to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services:

- Primary Care Access and Preventive Care
- Maternal and Perinatal Health

Because Rhode Island covers a high percentage of its children, Rlte Care offers comprehensive coverage, Rhode Island performs well on many maternal and perinatal health indicators compared to other states; however, these metrics mask the unacceptable racial disparities in maternal, infant, and child health that need to be addressed.

### Health Outcomes, by Race and Ethnicity, Rhode Island

	ALL RACES	ASIAN	BLACK	HISPANIC	NATIVE AMERICAN	WHITE
Children Without Health Insurance	1.9%	2.0%	4.9%	3.1%	*	1.4%
Women With Delayed or No Prenatal Care	16.1%	17.8%	23.5%	19.0%	21.3%	13.1%
Preterm Births	8.9%	7.7%	11.5%	9.6%	13.7%	8.2%
Low Birthweight Infants	7.7%	7.6%	11.7%	8.1%	11%	6.6%
Infant Mortality (per 1,000 live births)	5.4	4.8^	12	6.3	*	3.5
Births to Teens Ages 15-19 (per 1,000 teens)	12.4	3.3	14.9	29.5	27.9	6.4

**Unacceptable gaps in health outcomes by race and ethnicity are apparent in health insurance coverage, delayed prenatal care, preterm births, low birthweight infants, infant mortality, and births to teens.**

Racism and implicit bias continue to drive health inequity in the United States. A growing body of evidence indicates that pervasive racial bias against Black women and unequal treatment of Black women in the health care system often results in inadequate treatment. This coupled with stress from racism and racial discrimination contribute to poor maternal health outcomes among Black women. Nationally, Black women are 3 to 4 times more likely than white women to die of pregnancy-related complications.

“In order to effectively dismantle maternal and infant health disparities - and work to achieve health equity in communities of color - it is crucial that the voice and perspective of those most impacted by these issues are considered,” said Kaitlyn Rabb, Policy Analyst at Rhode Island KIDS COUNT. “A key strategy is making doula services available for women, through Medicaid and private health insurance, especially those in communities most impacted by these disparities.”

This year, we are celebrating an important victory in addressing racial and ethnic disparities in maternal health. Earlier this year, the *Rhode Island Doula Reimbursement Act* passed. This bill was sponsored by Representative Marcia Rangelin-Vassell and Senator Ana Quezada and championed by a large doula and community-led campaign that worked for three years to advocate for passage of **Rhode Island's doula bill – the only one of its kind in the nation** – which requires reimbursement for doula services by both Medicaid and private insurance plans. This new law is an important step forward in achieving equity in maternal health, but we must continue to work to eliminate racial and ethnic disparities in maternal and infant health.

### **COVID-19 – Immediate Impacts and Increasing Inequity**

In Rhode Island, the COVID-19 pandemic has disproportionately impacted our Latino and Black communities. These communities have had higher rates of infection, hospitalization, and deaths associated with COVID-19 and have experienced job loss, housing instability, and hunger associated with the economic impacts of the pandemic.

### **Recommendations**

To further improve the health of children in our state – and to prevent the worsening of disparities, or increasing negative health outcomes – Rhode Island KIDS COUNT recommends that Rhode Island:

- Restore Rhode Island's policy of Covering All Kids with health insurance, regardless of immigration status, including undocumented children\*
- Provide twelve months of continuous Medicaid coverage for postpartum women rather than the current 60 days postpartum\*
- Close racial/ethnic disparities across health indicators with a focus on maternal and infant morbidity/mortality
- Increase the supply of affordable housing for children and families and use ARPA funding to invest in affordable housing
- Provide comprehensive behavioral health services in schools and community-based settings so that children and youth have the right care in the right setting and for the appropriate duration. Provide ARPA funding to address the staffing crisis in community-based programs
- Address infant and early childhood mental health needs and two-generation mental health in the early years\*
- Continue to focus on patient-centered care for children and families (PCMH Kids) and provide ARPA funding for pediatric outreach so that well-child visits return to pre-pandemic levels
- Improve our state's paid family leave program so more low-income families can benefit, and extend the number of weeks to 12 weeks\*
- Address the staffing crisis in our state's Early Intervention programs by providing ARPA funding now through the supplemental budget request, the Early Educator Investment Act, and increasing Medicaid rates that have not been increased in twenty years\*

Rhode Island KIDS Count is a leader, with 7 other organizations, of the Right from the Start Campaign, a legislative and budget campaign to advance state policies for young children and their families in Rhode Island. The Campaign's policy priorities include the items noted with an asterisk.

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*[Rhode Island KIDS COUNT](#) is a statewide children's policy organization that works to improve the health, economic well-being, safety, education, and development of Rhode Island children with a core focus on equity.*