

Improving maternal health

Reducing disparities in rural and underserved communities, **U.S.**

Project ECHO will enhance the knowledge and skills of rural perinatal care providers so that they can provide best-practice care to rural patients and reduce maternal health disparities.

The problem

Pregnant patients living in rural areas face significant barriers to maternity care. Due to existing health and social disparities affecting rural populations, and coupled with the closure of rural hospitals and workforce shortages, rural populations face greater pregnancy risks, leading to higher maternal mortality rates among rural populations.¹ The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported that rural areas had a pregnancy-related mortality ratio of 29.4 per 100,000 live births, compared to 18.2/100,000 in urban areas. The disparities are even greater for communities of color, and maternal mortality rates are disproportionately higher for Native American, Hispanic, and Black patients in rural areas.²

The partner

Project ECHO was founded by Dr. Sanjeev Arora to ensure the right knowledge exists at the right place at the right time. The ECHO Model® is an “all teach, all learn” tele-mentoring approach that reduces health disparities in underserved areas by using a digital platform to move specialized medical knowledge from academic medical and tertiary care centers (“hubs”) to local healthcare providers (HCPs) practicing at clinics in remote and underserved areas (“spokes”).

The philanthropic solution

The Improving Perinatal Health ECHO Program will provide training, mentorship, and support to midwives and other perinatal health providers in rural and underserved communities, first targeting those in New Mexico, Arizona, and west Texas and then expanding into regions with high maternal mortality rates for people of color. Using the ECHO model, this project will enhance the knowledge and skills of rural perinatal care

providers so that they can provide high-quality, best-practice care to patients, increase access to maternal health care, and reduce maternal health disparities faced by rural and underserved populations.

The evidence

In 2011, a rigorous evaluation published in the New England Journal of Medicine showed that the care delivered to hepatitis C patients by ECHO-trained providers was equal to that of University of New Mexico specialists. The ECHO model now is being used across health care, education and climate change, with participants in more than 9,000 cities and 180 countries.

The impact

Over one year the project will:

- Provide training and mentorship to 250 healthcare providers, with a focus on midwives, to diagnose and treat perinatal conditions
- Launch a Perinatal MetaECHO Collaborative that brings together ECHO partners working on maternal health topics across the country and the world
- Conduct an evaluation of the program to measure its impact on rural providers’ knowledge and confidence to provide best-practice perinatal health care to their patients

Location	United States
Target group	250 healthcare providers
Partner(s)	Project ECHO
Co-sponsors	J&J Foundation
Grant total	USD 579,844
SDG(s)	SDG 3 – Good Health & Wellbeing SGD 10 – Reduced Inequalities (for access to care)
Duration	12 Months
Program ID	52664

¹ Lewis, Corrine et. al. “The Rural Maternity Care Crisis.” August 15, 2019. The Commonwealth Fund. Retrieved on October 28, 2021 from: <https://www.commonwealth-fund.org/blog/2019/rural-maternity-care-crisis>

² “Maternal and Obstetric Care Challenges in Rural America: Policy Brief and Recommendations to the Secretary.” May 2020. National Advisory Committee on Rural Health and Human Services. Retrieved on November 1, 2021 from: <https://www.hrsa.gov/sites/default/files/hrsa/advisory-committees/rural/publications/2020-maternalobstetric-care-challenges.pdf>

All programmatic data provided by Project ECHO. The UBS Optimus Foundation is a grant-making foundation that offers UBS clients a platform to use their wealth to drive positive social and environmental change. The Foundation selects programs that improve children's health, education and protection, ones that have the potential to be transformative, scalable and sustainable as well as programs tackling environmental and climate issues.

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