



Region 7

Maternal Health ECHO[®] Summit

*Bridging Community and Health Systems
to Help Mothers Thrive*

May 26, 2026



Who We Are



- ▶ Nonprofit, nonpartisan educational institution based in Topeka.
- ▶ Established in 1995 with a multi-year grant from the Kansas Health Foundation.
- ▶ Committed to convening meaningful conversations around tough topics related to health.

Hello!

Avanthi Chatrathi, M.P.H.

Analyst

Kansas Health Institute

achatrathi@khi.org



Agenda

- 1 Welcome
- 2 **Keynote** – An Overview of the Maternal Health Landscape in the United States
- 3 **Presentation** – A Closer Look at Maternal Health in the U.S. and Health and Human Services (HHS) Region 7
- 4 **Region 7 Panel Discussion**
- 5 **ECHO[®] Orientation**
- 6 **Closing**

Region 7 Maternal Health ECHO®



Ad Astra ECHO Planning Team



Shelby Rowell
ECHO Lead Facilitator



Avanthi Chatrathi
ECHO Lead Facilitator



Rebecca Andrade
*ECHO Coordinator and
Curriculum Lead*

ECHO Hub Team

Kansas

- Celeste Brennan, *University of Kansas Medical Center*
- Rev. Tony Carter, *Salem Baptist Church (KCK), Vibrant Health Board of Directors, Kansas Birth Equity Network*
- Dr. Mariah Chrans, *Community Health Council of Wyandotte County*
- Dr. Babalola Faseru, *University of Kansas Medical Center*
- Dr. Jennifer Miller, *Kansas Department of Health and Environment*
- Oluoma Obi, *University of Kansas Medical Center, Kansas Birth Equity Network*
- Dr. Sharla Smith, *University of Kansas Medical Center, Kansas Birth Equity Network*

Nebraska

- Kara Foster, *Nebraska Perinatal Quality Improvement Collaborative (NPQIC)*
- Dr. Megan Kalata, *CHI Health in Omaha, Nebraska*
- Samantha Kenning, *Nebraska Perinatal Quality Improvement Collaborative*

ECHO Hub Team

Missouri

- Taylor Anderson, *Missouri Public Health Institute*
- Yollette Cochrane, *Grace Advertising and Consulting, Inc., Altruism Media*
- Amy Creighton, *Soul Song Doula Services*
- John Fitzpatrick, *KC Digital Drive, Maternal Health Data Salon*
- Jasmine James, *Altruism, Inc.*
- Dr. Traci Johnson, *University Health*
- Dr. Stacy Scott, *Global Infant Sleep Center*
- Martha Smith, *Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services*
- Tonia Wright, *Altruism, Inc.*

Iowa

- Ebonie Bailey, *The Birthwork Foundation*

Resource Guide



Convening Resource Guide May 26, 2026

Region 7 Maternal Health ECHO® Summit

On May 26, the Kansas Health Institute hosted a virtual summit that brought together community members and clinical professionals from Missouri, Iowa, Nebraska and Kansas. Participants explored practical strategies, heard real-world insights from those closest to the work and gained a clearer understanding of emerging maternal health needs across the region. Use this guide to dive deeper into key resources, reflect on discussion questions and capture your thoughts or takeaways as we explore maternal health in Region 7.

Watch the recording here!



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[Register for upcoming events.](#)

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 Follow us on social media @KHIorg.

Resources

-  **Access the Brief** Understand strategies to address barriers to accessing maternal care faced by rural, Black, and Somali immigrant and refugee women in the U.S. and in our region.

-  **Access the Brief** Examine how maternal health policy shapes the care team in Kansas.

-  **Explore the Findings** Discover how the holistic care coordination model could be expanded across primary care and maternal and child health programs in Kansas.

-  **Share the Link** Invite others to join the ECHO series! Share the registration link for future sessions.

Continued on second page.



KANSAS HEALTH INSTITUTE
Informing Policy. Improving Health.

Access your Resource Guide in the chat!

We Want to Hear from You!

You could be
anywhere today.
**What brings you to
today's summit?**



Keynote Address

An Overview of the Maternal Health Landscape in the United States

Sanaa Akbarali, M.P.H., P.M.P.

Senior Director, Maternal and Child Health

Association of State and Territorial Health Officials
(ASTHO)





Association of State and Territorial Health Officials
Sanaa Akbarali, Senior Director, Maternal and Child Health

Region 7 Maternal Health ECHO Summit
Keynote Address

Today's Agenda

- Introduction to ASTHO
- MCH National Landscape
- Policy Trends
- Project Spotlight: Risk-Appropriate Care
- Collaboration in Action
- Closing

Who We Are

ASTHO is a nonpartisan organization and the collective voice of the nation's health officials. Its members are the chief health officials of states, territories, and Freely Associated States, as well as Washington, D.C.

Our Vision: Optimal Health for All

Our Mission: To support, amplify, and advocate for the vital work of state and territorial health agencies in advancing the public's health and well-being.

Our Key Goals:

- **Public Health Leadership:** Support state and territorial health officials as they lead through critical times.
- **Health Department Capacity & Innovation:** Foster strategic innovation and provide value to all members of state and territorial health agencies.
- **Expanded Partnerships:** Broaden the impact of state and territorial health agencies by fostering non-traditional partnerships.
- **ASTHO Operations & Sustainability:** Strengthen ASTHO's internal operations, diversify our funding base, and empower a high-performing and resilient workforce.



Region 7 State Health Officials



Larry Johnson, JD

Director

Iowa Department of Health
and Human Services

Janet Stanek, MBA

Secretary

Kansas Department of
Health & Environment

Sarah Willson, MBA, BSN

Director

Missouri Department of
Health & Senior Services

Steve Corsi, PsyD

Chief Executive Officer
Nebraska Department of
Health & Human Services

Meet ASTHO's MCH Team



Sanaa Akbarali
SENIOR DIRECTOR

MATERNAL AND INFANT HEALTH



Ramya Flores
DIRECTOR



Lexie Giragosian
SENIOR ANALYST

CHILD AND ADOLESCENT HEALTH



Shannon Vance
DIRECTOR



Gabby Ruiz
SENIOR ANALYST

SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH



Brittany Lee
DIRECTOR



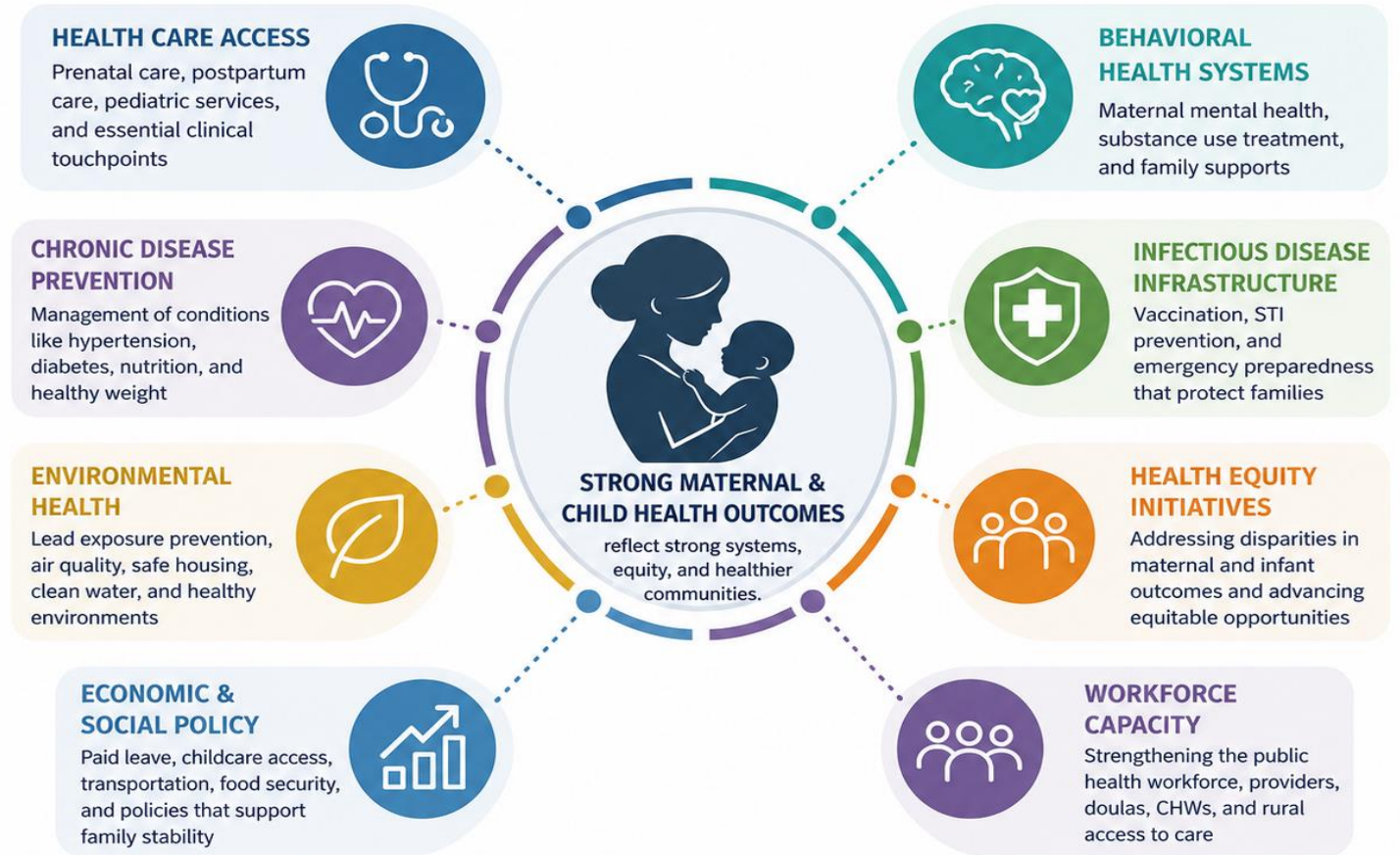
Sophia Durant
SENIOR ANALYST

What is MCH?

MATERNAL & CHILD HEALTH

AT THE CENTER OF PUBLIC HEALTH SYSTEMS

Maternal and child health serves as a bellwether for the broader public health system, reflecting the effectiveness of policies, cross-sector coordination, and investments that shape population health outcomes.



When systems are coordinated, equitable, and well-resourced, families thrive and communities are healthier.



MATERNAL & CHILD HEALTH IS EVERYONE'S BUSINESS.

- Maternal health outcomes continue to vary based on geography, access to care, and social and structural factors
- More than **80%** of pregnancy-related deaths in the U.S. are considered preventable
- More than **50%** of pregnancy-related deaths occur during the postpartum period
- Nearly **35%** of counties are considered maternity care deserts or have limited maternity care access



Policy Trends

Maternal Mortality and Morbidity Prevention

- Expanding postpartum coverage and care coordination
- Strengthening Maternal Mortality Review Committees (MMRCs)
- **Improving risk-appropriate care and Levels of Maternal Care (LoMC)**
 - Regionalized systems of care
 - Transportation and referral coordination
 - Addressing hospital and birthing unit closures
- Rural health transformation initiatives
- Postpartum period as critical gap in care
- Data collection and modernization efforts



Perinatal Behavioral Health

- Expansion of maternal mental health screening and investments in psychiatric consultation programs
- Growth of the national Maternal Mental Health Hotline
- Integrated behavioral health within prenatal/postpartum care
- Substance use disorder treatment for pregnant and postpartum women



Medicaid Expansion and Postpartum Coverage

- 12-month postpartum Medicaid coverage extension
- Doula reimbursement
- Lactation consultant reimbursement
- Home visiting reimbursement models
- Value-based maternity care models



MCH Workforce Development

- Workforce shortages are a critical issue nationally, especially in:
 - OB/GYN care
 - Midwifery
 - Nursing
 - Behavioral health
 - Community health workers
 - Lactation support
 - Doulas
- States are exploring loan repayment, licensure flexibility, telehealth expansion, and pipeline programs to address shortages.



Prenatal Care Access

- Recent data shows declines in first-trimester prenatal care initiation. Policymakers are discussing:
 - Earlier enrollment pathways
 - Mobile prenatal care
 - Community-based prenatal models
 - Telehealth strategies
 - Insurance continuity during pregnancy
- Access challenges are increasing across many states



Contraceptive Care Access

- Shifts in the contraceptive care landscape
- ASTHO's SUSTAIN Initiative strengthens S/THA-led systems to ensure that contraceptive access policies translate into sustainable, accessible service delivery.
- Advancing implementation of innovative delivery models (e.g., pharmacist-prescribed contraception)
- Strengthening financing, policy and infrastructure (e.g., improving utilization of Medicaid family planning (FP) SPAs and waivers)
- Supporting states in navigating Title X and other contraceptive care disruptions.



Child and Adolescent Health

MCH policy is broader than maternal health alone. Trends include:

- School-based health centers
- Early childhood mental health
- Early brain development initiatives
- Family-centered care models
- Youth behavioral health integration
- Addressing adverse childhood experiences (ACEs)

There is growing recognition that maternal and infant outcomes are deeply connected to broader family and child health systems.



Risk-Appropriate Care (RAC) Learning Community



- Risk-appropriate care is a key strategy to improve maternal and neonatal morbidity and mortality rates by ensuring high-risk pregnant people and infants receive care at a birth facility that is best prepared to meet their needs.
- Levels of maternal care (LoMC) is a classification system used to assess facility capacity to address maternal risk factors and complications.
- Strengthening RAC systems can improve health outcomes for pregnant and birthing women and reduce the incidence of severe maternal morbidity and mortality.

ASTHO Brief

Implementing Levels of Maternal Care Improves Access to Risk-Appropriate Care

[Risk-appropriate care](#) (RAC) is a strategy to ensure that pregnant women and infants with high risk of complications receive care at facilities with personnel who offer services at the required level of specialized care. States can use the process of perinatal regionalization to create coordinated care systems based on levels of maternal care to support RAC access. Implementing and strengthening maternal RAC systems can improve health outcomes for pregnant and birthing populations and reduce the incidence of severe maternal morbidity and mortality.

"Risk-appropriate care is a tiered system of care for moms and newborns that provides the right care, at the right time, the right place, and with the right team."

Wanda Barfield, MD, MPH, Director, CDC Division of Reproductive Health

Defining Levels of Maternal Care

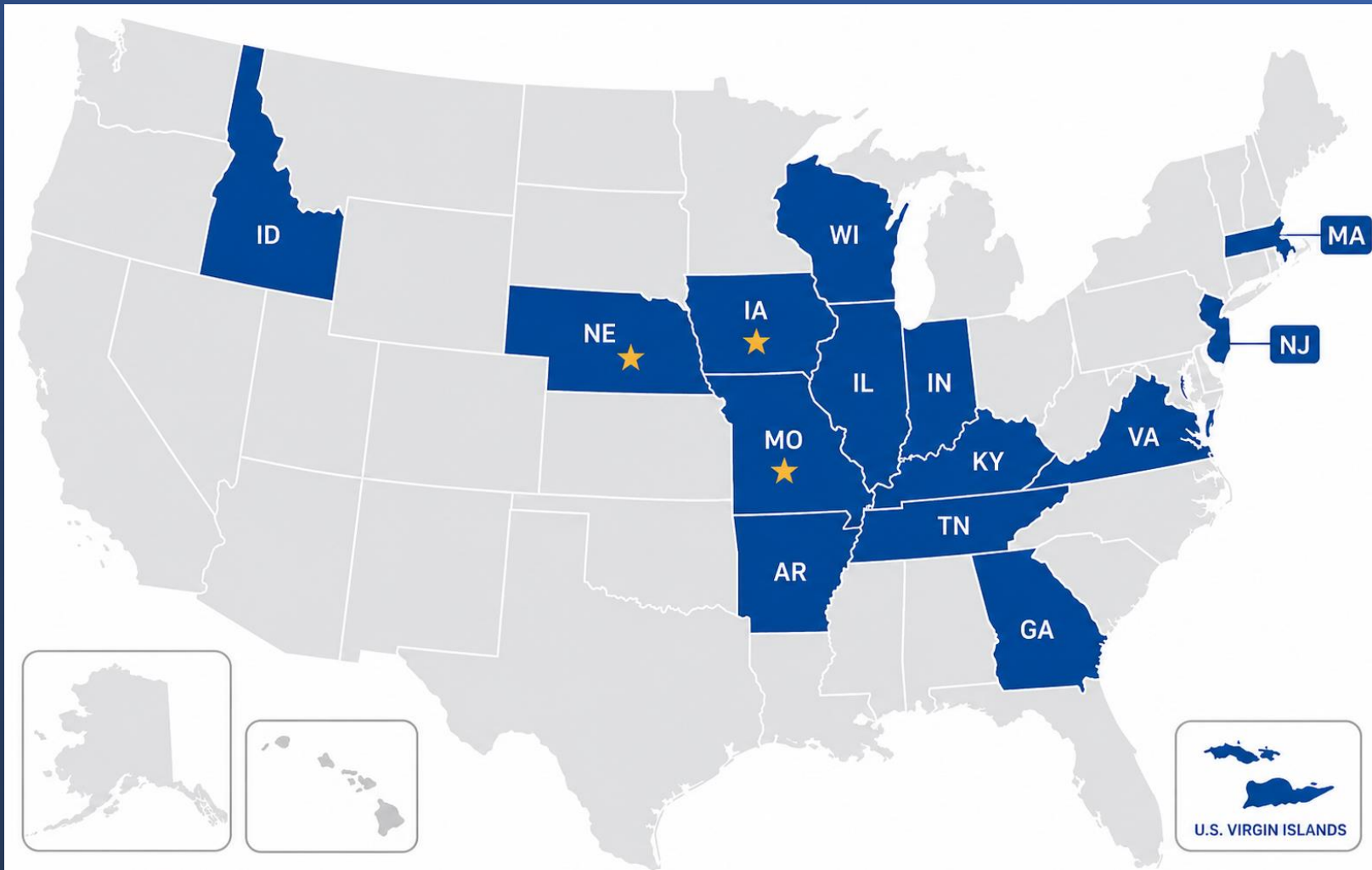
Levels of maternal care (LoMC) are a [classification system that assesses the capacity](#) of facilities to address maternal risk factors and complications. If implemented at the state level, LoMC can improve access to RAC and support standardized, complete, and integrated systems of [perinatal regionalization](#).

Table 1. Levels of Maternal Care by the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG)

Accredited birth center	Care for low-risk pregnancies with uncomplicated singleton-term pregnancies who are expected to have an uncomplicated birth. The American Association of Birth Centers sets the national standards for birth centers.
Level I (basic care)	Care of low- to moderate-risk pregnancies with the ability to detect, stabilize, and initiate management of unanticipated maternal-fetal or neonatal problems that occur during the antepartum, intrapartum, or postpartum period until the patient can be transferred to a facility where specialty maternal care is available.
Level II (specialty care)	Level I facility plus care of appropriate moderate- to high-risk antepartum, intrapartum, or postpartum conditions.
Level III (subspecialty care)	Level II facility plus care of more complex maternal medical conditions, obstetric complications, and fetal conditions.
Level IV (regional perinatal health)	Level III facility plus on-site medical and surgical care of the most complex maternal conditions and critically ill pregnant women and fetuses throughout antepartum,

Table 1: [Levels of Maternal Care by the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists \(ACOG\)](#)

Level of Care	Definition
Accredited birth center	Care for low-risk pregnancies with uncomplicated singleton-term pregnancies who are expected to have an uncomplicated birth. The American Association of Birth Centers sets the national standards for birth centers.
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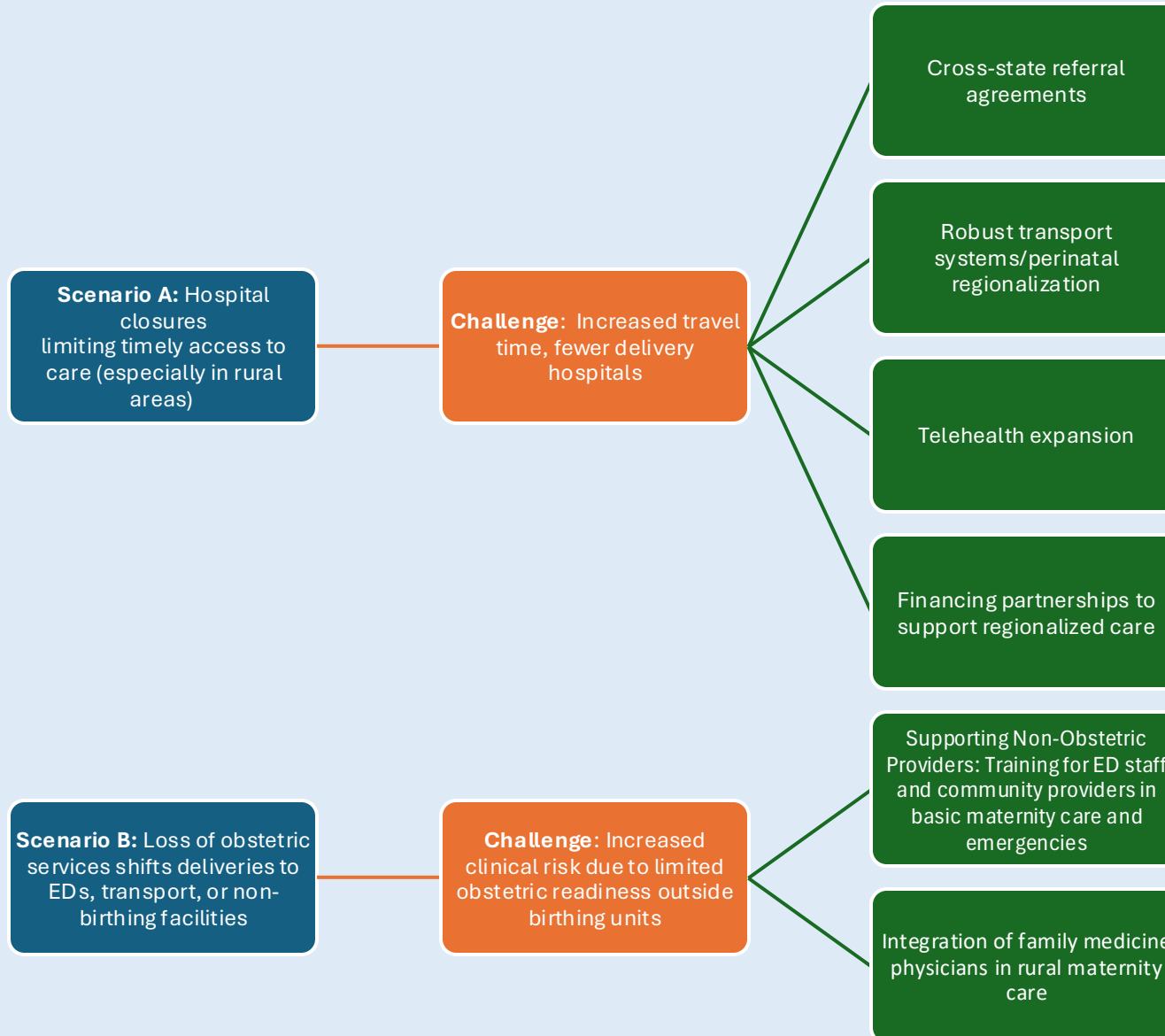


ASTHO's RAC Learning Community States

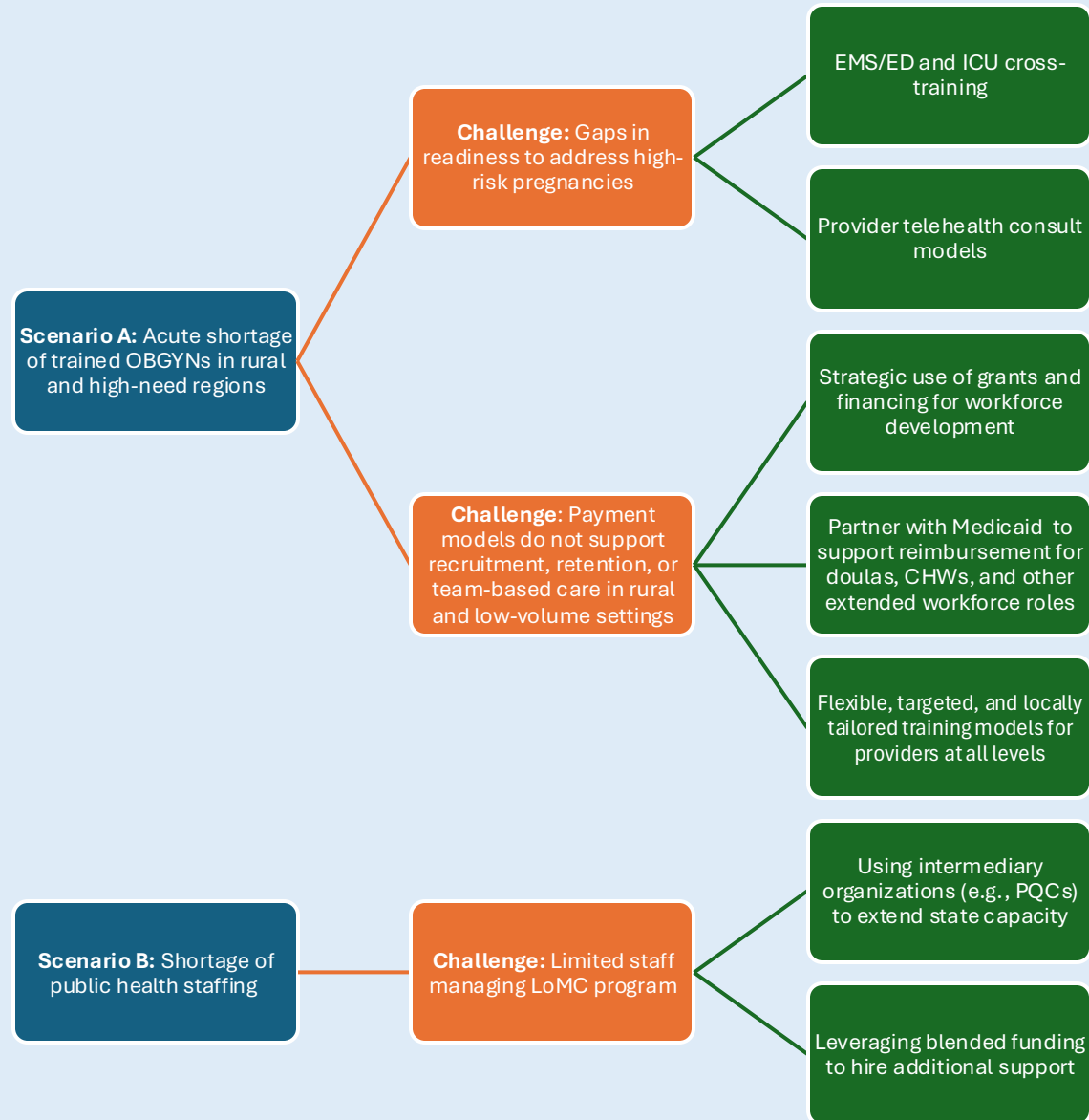
Risk-Appropriate Care: Key Informant Interview Themes

- Addressing the impact of hospital closures
- Increasing workforce capacity in clinical and public health settings
- Hospital leadership buy-in and consumer awareness
- CDC LOCATe[®], designation, and verification
- Funding and sustainability

Key Themes: Hospital Closures



Key Themes: MCH Workforce Capacity



An aerial photograph of a winding asphalt road through rolling green hills. A small white car is driving on the road. The landscape is lush and green, with a river or stream visible in the distance. The sky is bright and hazy.

IF EVERYONE IS MOVING FORWARD TOGETHER

THEN SUCCESS TAKES CARE OF ITSELF

-Henry Ford

Advancing State MCH Policymaking through Boundary Spanning Leadership: Missouri

- Missouri leveraged Boundary Spanning Leadership (BSL) to strengthen partnerships and address emerging maternal and infant health needs.
- BSL focuses on building direction, alignment, and shared commitment across sectors to achieve a common goal.
- Participants included state agencies, community-based organizations, academic institutions, and local public health partners working together to improve maternal and infant health outcomes.

Advancing State MCH Policymaking through Boundary Spanning Leadership: Missouri



Recognizing Shared Barriers: Participants identified funding as a challenge when developing programmatic and policy initiatives, highlighting complex state and federal funding structures, bureaucracy, and sustainability.



Collaboration and Coordination: Participants discussed the disconnect between the availability and accessibility of MCH services in Missouri, which results from fragmented communication between agencies, leading to duplication of efforts and straining already limited resources as well as personnel.



Public Health Workforce Capacity: The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in workforce turnover and decreased capacity, leading to further disruptions in service delivery, quality, and efficiency.

MCH in

action!



Thank you!

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A Closer Look at Maternal Health in the U.S. and HHS Region 7

Issue Brief Authors



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Access the Brief

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30

ISSUE BRIEF

A CLOSER LOOK AT MATERNAL HEALTH IN THE U.S. AND HHS REGION VII

EXAMINING BARRIERS IN RURAL, BLACK, AND SOMALI IMMIGRANT AND REFUGEE POPULATIONS

Introduction

Maternal health care plays an essential role in positive outcomes for both mothers and babies. Research suggests that there are several factors contributing to poor maternal health outcomes nationally, including a complex medical system, health insurance gaps, systemic racism and discrimination, and economic and geographical disparities. These factors have contributed to maternal mortality rates above the Healthy People 2030 target in Kansas and its Health and Human Services (HHS) Region VII neighbors, Missouri, Nebraska and Iowa.

Maternal health challenges have been discussed across Region VII, making it a priority topic for communities in the heartland. The Kansas Health Institute (KHI) conducted four listening sessions in 2024. Access to maternal health services was one of the key challenges for communities, especially among rural, Black and Somali immigrant and refugee populations.

Disparities for these populations are reflected in national maternal mortality data. Maternal mortality rates are one indicator of maternal health that can offer insight into quality of care and outcomes before, during and after

pregnancy. The U.S. maternal mortality rate decreased to 18.6 deaths per 100,000 live births in 2023, down from 22.3 in 2022. However, racial, ethnic and geographic disparities persist. In 2023, non-Hispanic Black mothers experienced the highest group rate of maternal mortality (50.3), more than double the U.S. overall rate. In 2021, the latest data available by geography, mothers in rural (non-metropolitan) areas also experienced a higher rate of maternal mortality (42.9) compared to mothers in metropolitan areas (31.3) and the U.S. (32.9).

These rates are higher than the Healthy People 2030 target rate for reducing maternal mortality, 15.7 deaths per 100,000 live births. The Region VII maternal mortality rates by state are higher than the national goal, as shown in Figure 1, page 2. Region VII state health departments have focused on addressing maternal health challenges, as shown in reports from: [Kansas Department of Health and Environment](#), [Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services](#), [Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services](#), and [Iowa Department of Health and Human Services](#). Region VII states also have extended Medicaid postpartum coverage for up to one year after birth.

KEY POINTS

- ✓ Nationally, rural, Black, and Somali immigrant and refugee women face shared and unique challenges in accessing maternal health care (e.g. closure of labor and delivery units, financial hardships, medical system navigation, mothers not feeling heard in clinical settings).
- ✓ None of the states in HHS Region VII (Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska and Iowa) meet Healthy People 2030 targets for reducing maternal mortality (15.7 deaths per 100,000 live births).
- ✓ Nationally, higher rates of maternal mortality are experienced by rural and Black communities.
- ✓ Across the nation and in Region VII, community-based solutions (e.g., culturally tailored programs and services), such as those that utilize community health workers and doulas, are effective for all three populations.

2025

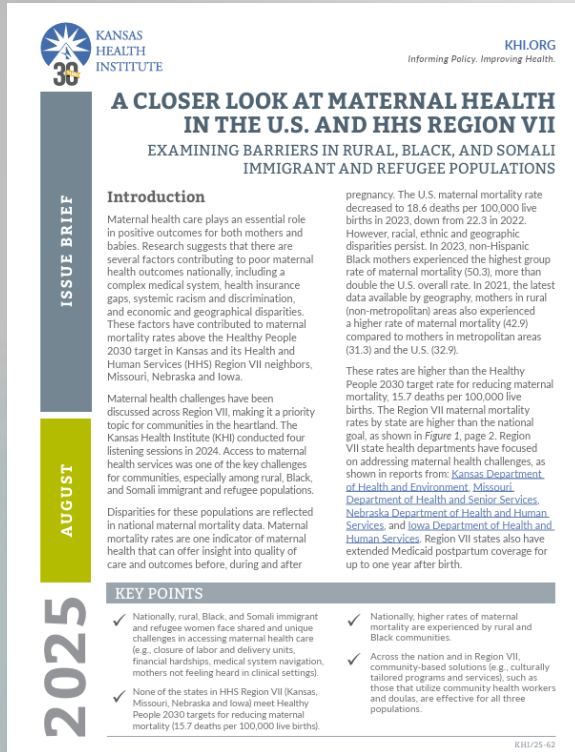
AUGUST

KHI/25-62



bit.ly/4m12kV7

Key Points of the Maternal Health Issue Brief



1

Nationally, rural, Black and Somali immigrant and refugee women face shared and unique challenges in accessing maternal health care.

2

None of the states in HHS Region 7 meet Healthy People 2030 targets for reducing maternal mortality (15.7 deaths per 100,000 live births).

3

Nationally, higher rates of maternal mortality are experienced by rural and Black communities.

4

Across the nation and in Region 7, community-based solutions, such as those that utilize community health workers and doulas, are effective for all three populations.

Barriers to Accessing Maternal Care

Distinct and shared challenges by population group:

Population Group	Barriers
Rural Communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Closure of labor and delivery units (increased travel distances)• Staffing shortages• Lack of affordable and consistent broadband access
Black or African American Communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Systemic racism and discrimination• Stress and anxiety• Lack of transportation
Somali Immigrant and Refugee Communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Preferences for female providers• History of trauma• Lack of child care, language access and transportation• Limited health literacy and formal education
Shared Barriers Across All Three Populations	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Health insurance gaps and inadequate coverage• Difficulty navigating the medical system• Financial hardships

Note: This figure includes common themes from a Kansas Health Institute literature review of 22 national and 12 local studies, a total of 34 articles. Two of the articles focused on Somali immigrant and refugee populations.

Improving Maternal Health Outcomes

Cross-Cutting Strategies



Improving Maternal Health Outcomes

Population-Specific Strategies

Rural: Increasing access to broadband internet, expanding midwifery education and support programs.

Black: Strengthening social support, addressing racial discrimination in medical care practices, community engagement and data sharing.

Somali: Providing culturally tailored services, addressing barriers related to medical system navigation.



Region 7 Panel Discussion

Meet the Panelists



Ebonie Bailey
CD (DONA)

*Founder and
Executive Director*
The Birthwork
Foundation, Iowa



Catherine Friends
M.S.N., FNP-C

Director of Maternal Health
The SHINE with Joy (SWJ)
Foundation, Kansas



Megan Kalata,
M.D./M.P.H.

OB/GYN
Creighton University/CHI
Health, Nebraska



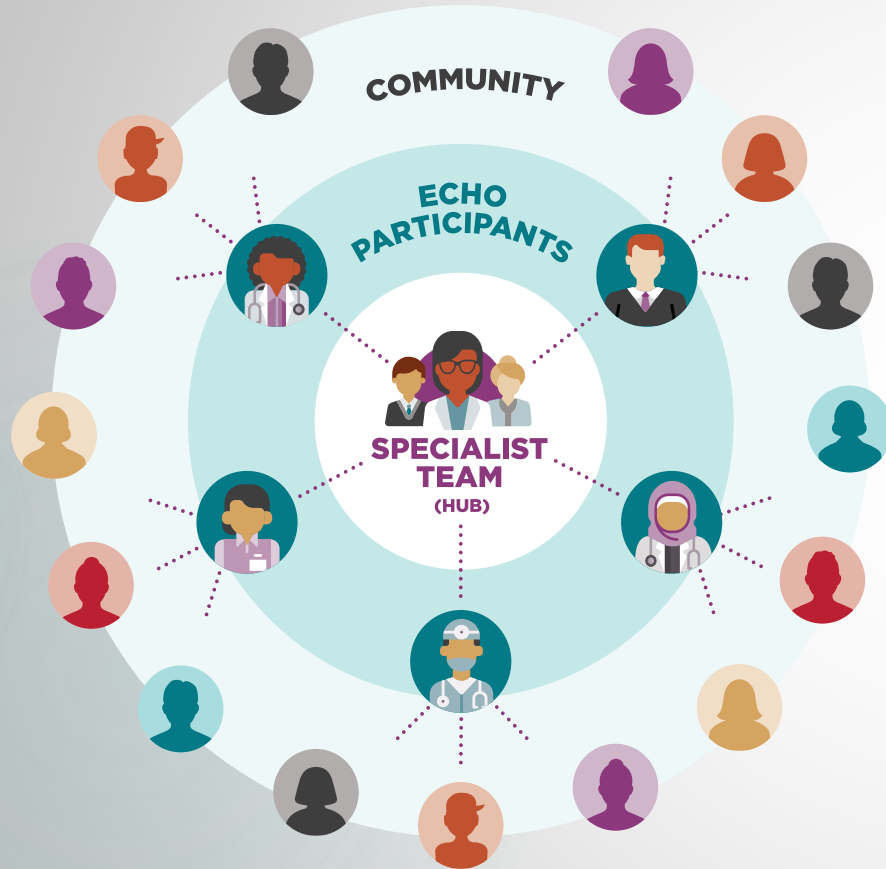
Aviance Webb,
B.S.

*Maternal Child Health Family
Support Services Program
Manager*
City of Kansas City Health
Department, Missouri



ECHO Orientation

The ECHO Model: All Teach, All Learn



Source: Project ECHO



 bit.ly/4wy8m5w

ECHO: Extension for Community Health Care Outcomes



Technology



Community of practice



Case-based learning



Surveys

Region 7 Maternal Health ECHO[®]



Region 7 Maternal Health ECHO

Overarching Objectives

- ▶ **Use** actionable strategies to engage mothers and community voices in shaping service delivery and evaluation.
- ▶ **Build** networks across Region 7 to share practices, resources and data-informed insights.
- ▶ **Leverage** community-based approaches (e.g., CHWs, doulas) in collaboration with clinical systems.
- ▶ **Identify** and share strategies to address region-specific maternal health barriers (e.g., access, transportation, trauma).

Region 7 Maternal Health ECHO Sessions

Session 1 | June 23

**Enhancing Regional
Collaboration and
Resource Sharing**

Session 2 | July 28

**Bridging Community
and Clinical
Approaches**

Session 3 | Aug. 25

**Removing Structural
and Financial Barriers**

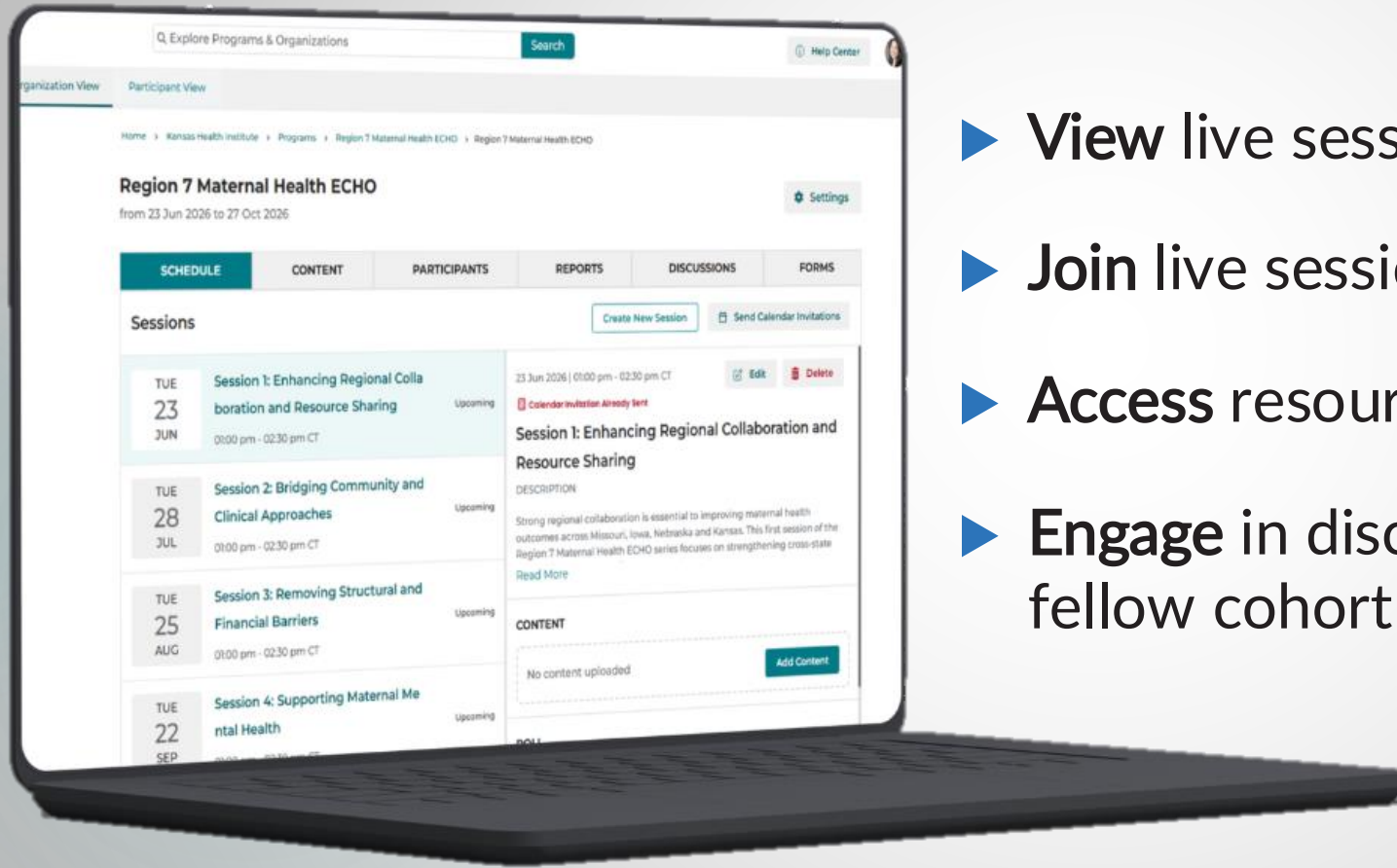
Session 4 | Sept. 22

**Supporting Maternal
Mental Health**

Session 5 | Oct. 27

**Reflecting and
Moving Forward
Together**

iECHO: What is it and what does it offer?



- ▶ View live session schedule and details
- ▶ Join live sessions
- ▶ Access resources and support
- ▶ Engage in discussion boards with fellow cohort members

iECHO Registration

Region 7 Maternal Health ECHO

Public Health | Maternal And Child Health | Maternal Mental Health
Maternal Support Services | Community Health

PROVIDES CERTIFICATE
By Kansas Health Institute

Led By: View All

Region 7 Maternal Health ECHO®
Bridging Community and Health Systems to Help Mothers Thrive

Participant Group
23 Jun 2026 - 27 Oct 2026
Region 7 Maternal Health ECHO
English 55/100

Register Now

Upcoming Sessions

TUE 23 JUN	Session 1: Enhancing Regional Collaboration and Resource Sharing 01:00 pm - 02:30 pm CDT
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Welcome, Rebecca A

Your Journey

3 Programs Enrolled | 2 Sessions Attended | 0 Certificates Received

Upcoming Sessions

TUE 23 JUN	Session 1: Enhancing Regional Collaboration and Resource Sharing 01:00 pm - 02:30 pm CT Program: Region 7 Maternal Health ECHO By Kansas Health Institute
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Complete your registration form to join this program.

Continue Registration



Next Steps

Resource Guide



Convening Resource Guide May 26, 2026

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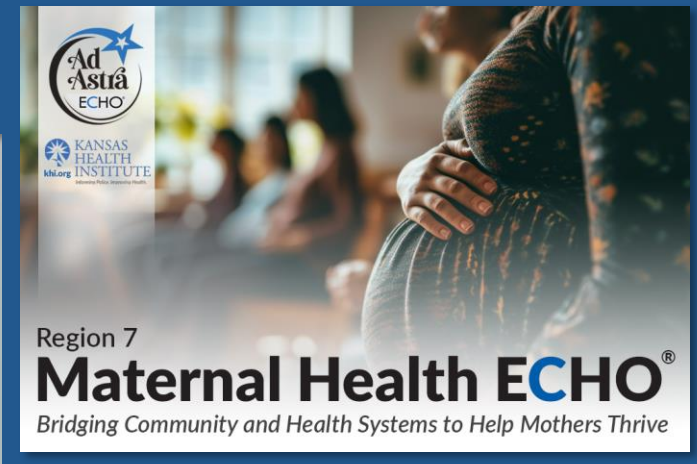
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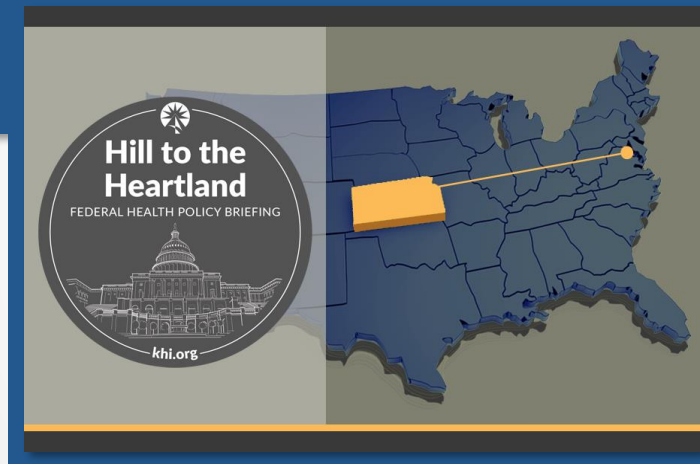
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