

Population Association of America Association of Population Centers

Office of Government and Public Affairs

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February 20, 2020

Sent via email to: IMPROVEinitiative@od.nih.gov.

To whom it may concern:

On behalf of the over 3,000 behavioral and social scientists who are members of the Population Association of America (PAA) (www.populationassociation.org), I am pleased to submit comments in response to the National Institutes of Health (NIH) Request for Information (RFI): Input on a Proposed Research Initiative to Decrease Maternal Mortality ([NOT-20-OD-063](#)). PAA commends the NIH for recognizing the significant rise in maternal mortality and pursuing implementation of an ambitious trans-NIH research initiative to reduce maternal mortality in the United States.

Maternal mortality has been rising markedly over the last decade. The level of maternal mortality in the US exceeds that in most developed countries. Recent data from the National Center for Health Statistics indicates that maternal mortality is not the only cause of death that has risen among middle aged Americans in this century. Indeed, the rise in opioid deaths has also characterized this age group and trends in maternal mortality may be linked to the nation's ongoing opioid crisis. Regardless, maternal deaths should not occur in a country where good obstetric care and abundant health care resources are available to expectant mothers. Determining the social and psychological factors that may prevent expectant mothers from seeking prenatal care and influence them to engage in risky, harmful behaviors is important as is determining how these factors relate to economic and social conditions, and health care use and availability.

PAA is particularly pleased that the proposed initiative will encourage research "to address risk factors and identify biomarkers of poor outcomes for women pre-pregnancy, during pregnancy and delivery, and postpartum, particularly in populations disproportionately affected by maternal health disparities (i.e., African American women, American Indian/Alaska Native, rural populations)." Our organization urges the NIH to ensure that these new research opportunities also encourage scientists to study the social determinants of maternal morbidity and mortality. Further, we think it is especially important for the NIH to encourage research on geographic differences in maternal mortality outcomes. Encouraging scientists to examine such contexts will help facilitate the eventual adoption of effective interventions and policies. Finally, we believe the initiative should put high maternal mortality in the context of high mortality among young adults.

Although it is being developed as trans-NIH initiative, PAA urges the agency to prioritize including the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development and National Institute on Minority Health and Health Disparities in the design and execution phases of the initiative. These Institutes have unique expertise on the topic of maternal mortality that should be exploited extensively.

Thank you for considering our comments. The Population Association of America is eager to work with the NIH to ensure the success of this visionary research initiative and to reverse the tragic maternal mortality trend in the United States.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Eileen M. Crimmins". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized "E" and "C".

Eileen Crimmins, Ph.D.
2020 President
Population Association of America