



**Sheila Dixon**

*Mayor,*  
Baltimore

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **Mayor Dixon Announces City-Wide Birth Outcomes Effort**

*CareFirst contributes \$3 million to fund program.*

Baltimore, MD (April 8, 2009) – Mayor Sheila Dixon joined Olivia Farrow, Interim Commissioner of the Baltimore City Health Department, Chet Burrell, President and CEO of CareFirst BlueCross BlueShield (CareFirst) and Rafael Lopez, Executive Director of the Family League, to announce a city-wide strategy to improve birth outcomes.

CareFirst has committed \$3 million over three years to fund the program. This is the organization's largest contribution ever for a community-based program.

“By bringing together community partners throughout the state, this birth outcomes plan is a critical first step toward addressing infant mortality in Baltimore City,” said Mayor Dixon. “I commend CareFirst for making such an extraordinary commitment to the citizens of Baltimore.”

In 2007, 112 babies from Baltimore City died before their first birthday. Of these, 106 were born to African-American mothers. The rate of infant death in Baltimore was 11.3 per 1,000 live births in 2007, the second highest of Maryland jurisdictions, and higher than the rates of some developing countries. The city's rate of infant mortality among African-Americans was 15.5 per 1,000 live births, reflecting deep health disparities. The cost of poor birth outcomes can be measured in medical expenses, lost productivity, and social injustice.

“A major interest of ours for this program is to help eliminate the social and economic disparities that hinder a mother's access to quality care,” said Burrell, President and CEO of CareFirst. “This partnership will help create sustainable health improvements for mothers and their infants, within their own communities, beginning before birth and hopefully stretching into longer, healthier lifetimes.”

The Strategy to Improve Birth Outcomes in Baltimore City starts with the understanding that many factors contribute to the three leading causes of excess infant death in the city: pre-term birth, low birth weight, and unsafe sleep. These factors include the health of the mother and father before conception, medical and social support during pregnancy, and access to critical information and services after birth.

The birth outcomes plan targets 12 community statistical areas within Baltimore City, proposing that a community-based program in each of these areas take responsibility for community birth outcomes. Backed by a citywide media campaign, these programs will generate demand and utilization for each of the high-impact service areas through intensive outreach and education. Simultaneously, local health agencies and the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene will work to expand the scale and capacity of the high impact services and to promote quality improvement in services for city residents.

CareFirst, the region's largest not-for-profit health insurer, is an active contributor to community efforts for improving health care in Baltimore City. In 2008, CareFirst giving in Maryland reached \$20 million. For more information on CareFirst Commitment visit [www.carefirstcommitment.com](http://www.carefirstcommitment.com).

For more information about the birth outcomes plan, please see the Health Department's website, [www.baltimorehealth.org](http://www.baltimorehealth.org)

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