

Every baby is sacred: Community care and early support

Overview Some Native communities face higher risk of birth differences because of long-standing gaps in care and resources. Every baby grows in their own way. Some differences can be seen early in pregnancy and cared for with love, guidance, and support from family and community. Some communities lack the care they need, and this can affect babies' health. This happens because systems have not treated families fairly, not because of the families themselves.

Unequal outcomes Native families have always held deep care for the life of a baby. Today, many families still face challenges because health systems are not designed with our teachings in mind.

- ▶ American Indian/Alaska Native women have a much higher risk of having a baby with a cleft lip with or without cleft palate.
- ▶ Hispanic women have the highest rates of spina bifida-affected births.
- ▶ The risk of death due to birth defects has been found to be higher for babies born to non-Hispanic Black moms and babies born to Hispanic moms.

Factors that drive health differences

A health difference happens when one group of people has worse health outcomes compared to another group with more resources or access to care. These differences have many causes, but challenges in access to quality care and the ways providers interact with patients from different backgrounds can play a major role.



Taking action

Cultural teachings, traditions, and community care help protect babies. When families are supported and culture is honored, babies grow healthy and strong. While not every birth difference can be prevented, caring for the body early through prenatal checkups, nourishing foods, clean water, and vitamins can support a baby's growth and well-being. If you don't have access to regular healthcare, you can contact your local health department about healthcare services in your area.

* While often described as "defects," many families and communities recognize congenital conditions as natural differences in how a child is formed. Using language like "born different" or "born with a unique condition" honors the dignity of each child without centering medicalized or deficit-based views.