



**THE CHILDREN'S HOME SOCIETY  
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## **MEDIA RELEASE**

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### **Improving the Perinatal Health of Women of Color and Immigrant Women from Central New Jersey to US Territory of Puerto Rico**

In celebration of Women's History Month in March 2024, The Children's Home Society of New Jersey (CHSoF NJ) is pleased to announce award of a federal, multi-year women's health grant. The new grant will reach women and birthing people across cultures and geographies – aligned well with the 2024 theme of Women's History Month: Women Who Advocate for Equity, Diversity and Inclusion. The National Women's History Alliance explains that the 2024 theme “recognizes women who understand that, for a positive future, we need to eliminate bias and discrimination entirely from our lives and institutions.”

CHSoF NJ, a non-profit based in Central New Jersey, was approved for a federal grant award (\$1,250,000 per year for 4-5 years) from the federal US Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Minority Health (US HHS OMH) for perinatal community integration between hospitals and community. The grant is aimed at improving the health and birth outcomes of diverse pregnant and postpartum women through culturally congruent, linguistically appropriate prenatal health education, doula services, case management and mental health supports; and enhancing training and integration of culturally congruent community doulas and community health workers at birthing hospitals and clinics in Central New Jersey and in the US Territory of Puerto Rico.

In Central NJ, the grant will support CHSoF NJ training 30 staff in case management that responds to families' social determinants of health; and support 2 embedded hospital liaisons who are community health workers. In Mercer County, the grant will support training 8-10 doula trainers and 25 community doula trainees; and deliver prenatal and postpartum education to 130 mothers and birthing people.

In Ocean and Monmouth County, the grant will support 8-12 doula trainers being trained; and 8-12 community doula trainees; and delivery of prenatal and postpartum education to 80 mothers and birthing people. In Puerto Rico, CHSoF NJ will support doula training for 8-10 local women and doula services there; and support a local non-profit to hire a healthy families coordinator and a community doula.

CHSofNJ Vice President, Maritza Raimundi Petroski says about the new grant, “In celebration of Women’s History Month, it gives me immense pleasure to announce the launch of our OMH Perinatal Community Integration Model (PCIM) grant. As CHSofNJ celebrates 130 years of saving children's lives and building healthy families, this model will support CHSofNJ efforts to reduce birth disparities and strengthen the integration of hospital and community collaborations across three NJ counties (Mercer, Ocean, and Monmouth). CHSofNJ’s range of maternal and child health services has shown considerable progress in enhancing the lives of Black and Brown women during their prenatal, childbirth, and postnatal journey. Now, we are excited to extend CHSofNJ technical assistance and share our experiences with additional immigrant and cultural communities in NJ and multiple municipalities in Puerto Rico over the next few years.”

This federal grant, is 1 of 10 in the nation, the only in NJ, and only such grant in the Mid-Atlantic US for enhancing perinatal community integration with hospital and clinic settings.

The PCIM grant will support the following maternal child health services. Participating parents, community health workers, and health care providers’ experiences will be independently evaluated by Rutgers University for this federal grant.

- **In Mercer County, NJ** – provide group prenatal and postpartum health education, 1:1 community doula services, and case management to families in these programs and, importantly, expand perinatal community health worker and community doula integration with health care providers at Capital Health Prenatal Clinic, Capital Health Hopewell, and Penn Medicine Princeton Health and various Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs) in Mercer County. Further, some Mercer County mothers are choosing to travel to Virtua Midwifery Birth & Wellness Center south of Mercer County.

**Hospital and birth center partners; and CHSofNJ programs had the following comments on the grant:**

“One of the best ways we can celebrate Women’s History Month is to make sure we are supporting women every day, regardless of what month it is,” said Dr. Eric Schwartz, Executive Director of the Capital Health Institute for Urban Care. “This includes ensuring women have access to quality perinatal care. Capital Health is pleased to work with community partners, like Children’s Home Society of NJ, to support efforts to reduce disparities in maternal and child health outcomes and improve social determinants of health.”

“The Virtua Midwifery Birth & Wellness Center is excited to partner with CHSofNJ to achieve better health outcomes for birthing individuals and their babies in central and southern New Jersey,” said Karen McEvoy Shields, CNM, MSN, FACNM, Director of the Virtua Midwifery Birth & Wellness Center located in Voorhees, NJ. “Our combined efforts in expanding training and services of doulas—who we value as important members of the birth team—as well as childbirth education classes, and community health services will benefit families from racially and ethnically diverse backgrounds during the birthing process and beyond. At Virtua Midwifery Birth & Wellness Center, we are committed to improving birth outcomes for all birthing families and newborns.”

CHSofNJ Maternal Child Health Services Supervisor, Vilma Aguirre says: “The Maternal Child Health Program in Mercer County has been a pillar of support for our community's expecting and new parents. Our prenatal and educational support groups, CUNA and Body and Soul, offer a safe haven where individuals find guidance, a sense of belonging, invaluable education and a network of support. We empower parents to navigate the challenges of pregnancy and parenthood with confidence. Through our programs, we improve birth outcomes, we transform lives and build resilient communities.”

CHSofNJ Family Services Supervisor Socorro Garcia comments, “For over a decade, the Family Success Centers in Trenton have been strong pillars of support for women and families. We've provided invaluable family support and light case management services such as assisting families with health insurance applications to ensure every child in NJ is covered, aiding with SNAP applications and monthly food distributions for enhanced food security, offering housing referrals, facilitating child development support, and connecting families with any other necessary resources. Through thick and thin, we've stood by families, offering practical assistance, guidance, and a compassionate shoulder to lean on during challenging times. Our commitment remains strong as we pledge to continue fostering stronger and more resilient families, providing support and guidance every step of the way.”

- **In Ocean and Monmouth Counties, NJ** – the grant will provide group prenatal health education, 1:1 community doula services, and case management to women in these programs and, also importantly integrate community health workers and community doulas in Monmouth and Ocean County hospitals in NJ, including Robert Wood Johnson Barnabas hospitals in Long Branch, and Toms River; and doula support at birth centers, such as TruBirth Center in Lakewood.

**Hospital and birth center partners; and CHSofNJ programs had the following comments on the grant:**

Jeff Surowitz, Executive Director of TruBirth Center in Lakewood, says, “CHSofNJ is once again in the trenches doing the important work to correct the systemic shortcomings in women’s healthcare. We consistently see the positive health outcomes that result from doulas being part of the birthing process. This initiative is a breath of fresh air that will certainly have a real impact on the families in our community.

Choresse Chambers, CHSofNJ Program Administrator for Ocean and Monmouth Counties says, “Community-based maternal child health and community-support initiatives like Connecting NJ for maternal health resources, Healthy Women Healthy Families for concrete resources and community health worker support, and Anchor Family Success Center for case management and family-focused programs strengthens mothers, children and families. Through our programs families gain the education, tools and support to take charge of their own health and well-being. An unjustified number of pregnant individuals die during childbirth and preventable issues claim the lives of too

many children. Our programs provide easy access to equitable and culturally responsive services and resources which help families thrive as a whole. I look forward to community health worker expansion and culturally responsive doula training and services here in Ocean and Monmouth Counties under CHSofNJ.”

**In Puerto Rico** – grant will provide technical assistance (TA) for Proyecto Nacer, a local maternal child health non-profit working with teen parents in Bayamon, Puerto Rico to begin doula services and training, including a Doula Training of Trainers for local residents in Bayamon. CHSofNJ TA, based on direct experience in Trenton; and providing TA to MCH non-profits and hospitals in Paterson and Newark, NJ will support Proyecto Nacer to onboard two staff members, a Healthy Families Coordinator and Community Doula – with a sub-award from this grant.

Dr. Anayra Tua, Proyecto Nacer Executive Director, in Puerto Rico says about the OMH PCIM grant, “In 24 years of experience in working with teen parents and families using a three-generation model known as Family Incubator model in Puerto Rico, we value the collaboration with CHSofNJ; and the shared learning and services that promote multiplied outcomes with multi generation approaches in marginalized populations because of the positive impact it will have for a lifetime.”

The PCIM grant to CHSofNJ will be independently evaluated by Rutgers University. Laura Lindberg, Ph.D., professor in the Department of Urban-Global Public Health at the Rutgers School of Public Health and Julie Blumenfeld, DNP, CNM, Director of the Nurse-Midwifery Program, Rutgers School of Nursing commented that, “We are looking forward to analyzing this important effort at perinatal community integration and supporting these innovative approaches to improve maternal health in New Jersey.”

CHSofNJ looks forward to this robust, multi-geography work to improve birth and health outcomes for communities of color and immigrant communities.

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