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**San Joaquin County Initiative Shines the Light on Unprecedented Number of Black Moms and Babies Dying from Pregnancy-Related Complications**  
*County Launches Innovative “Rally Around Our Sisters” Perinatal Equity Initiative to Raise Awareness of Ongoing Crisis*

**STOCKTON, CA** (April 26, 2021) - San Joaquin County Public Health Services (PHS) recently announced the launch of a potentially life-saving public health awareness campaign aimed at diminishing an alarming rate of black infants and mothers dying because of pregnancy or delivery complications.

Spearheaded by PHS’s Perinatal Equity Initiative (PEI) and dozens of community partners, [Rally Around Our Sisters](#) is a countywide multi-media public awareness campaign intended to raise awareness of the health-related inequities facing Black and African American women, leading to maternal and infant deaths.

“There's nothing more life-changing than the birth of a baby. But Black and African American women and infants are dying at a much higher rate than other racial groups. Many of these deaths are preventable and it has to stop,” said Maggie Park, MD, San Joaquin County Public Health Officer. “*Rally Around Our Sisters* is a community-centered call to action. This campaign is about the community coming together or rallying together, in support of Black and African American mothers to improve health outcomes for themselves and their babies.”

Most people are not aware of the shocking statistics. According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:

- Black and African American infants die at two times the rate of White infants, and three times the rate of Asian infants.
- Preterm birth is the dominant cause of infant mortality among Black and African American infants.
- The preterm birth rate among Black and African American women is almost 50 percent higher than the rate among all other women.
- The maternal mortality rate for Black and African Americans in California is nearly three times higher than the rate of white women.

“According to recent data for San Joaquin County, an average of 54 percent of pregnant and parenting Black and African American mothers are single, separated, widowed, or divorced compared to an average of nearly 16 percent of pregnant or parenting White mothers,” stated Reanna Wyatt, PEI Coordinator.

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Dr. Park also emphasized, “Institutional racism and social determinants of health often lead to chronic stress in Black and African American mothers. Data clearly indicates the critical need for this program.”

Factors that negatively impact pregnancy and lead to premature births, as well as infant and maternal deaths in Black and African American mothers in San Joaquin County include:

- Repeated incidents of racism
- Fewer financial resources
- Inadequate prenatal care
- Lack of proper nutrition
- Mental distress from personal and external sources
- Substance abuse

In addition to making the community aware of Black infant and maternal death rates and the underlying causes, *Rally Around our Sisters* is also designed to support women and infants by promoting unique wraparound services that complement PHS’ Black Infant Health Program (BIH). BIH provides social support, case management services, and assistance with referrals for Black and African American pregnant and parenting women.

Based on input from the PEI Community Advisory Board, and both quantitative and qualitative data, the program is focusing on two additional interventions to improve birth outcomes and reduce maternal deaths. These include a perinatal life coach-personal advocate program (SistaCoach), and a focus on the role of fathers and partners (Passport to Fatherhood).

“Black moms and babies deserve the same chance to survive and thrive,” affirms Lacesia Hawkins, PEI Community Advisory Board member. “But it will take an all-out effort among moms, dads, family, friends, health professionals and the whole community to ensure healthy results for Black and African American mothers and infants.”

To learn more about *Rally Around Our Sisters*, visit [www.rallyaroundoursisters.org](http://www.rallyaroundoursisters.org), call (209) 468- 3004 or follow us on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#).

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