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Marion County Maternal & Infant Health Report

An invitation to join the collective movement so every baby sees their 1st birthday

2026

A LETTER FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Imagine an Indianapolis where every mother — regardless of her ZIP code, her income, or her education — begins her pregnancy with a trusted, professional advocate by her side. An Indy where any mother could walk into her first prenatal appointment confident that she will be heard, cared for, and brought home with a healthy baby in her arms. An Indy where the difference between life and death is not decided by where a family happens to live.

That is the city Cradle Indy was built to create.

The pages that follow tell the truth about where we are today. The numbers are hard. They are also the reason this work cannot wait. Indiana has the third-worst maternal mortality rate in the nation. In some ZIP codes, infants are dying at more than twice the national rate. These are not just statistics. These are our sisters, our neighbors, our daughters. We believe no mother should have to build her own safety net to survive her pregnancy.

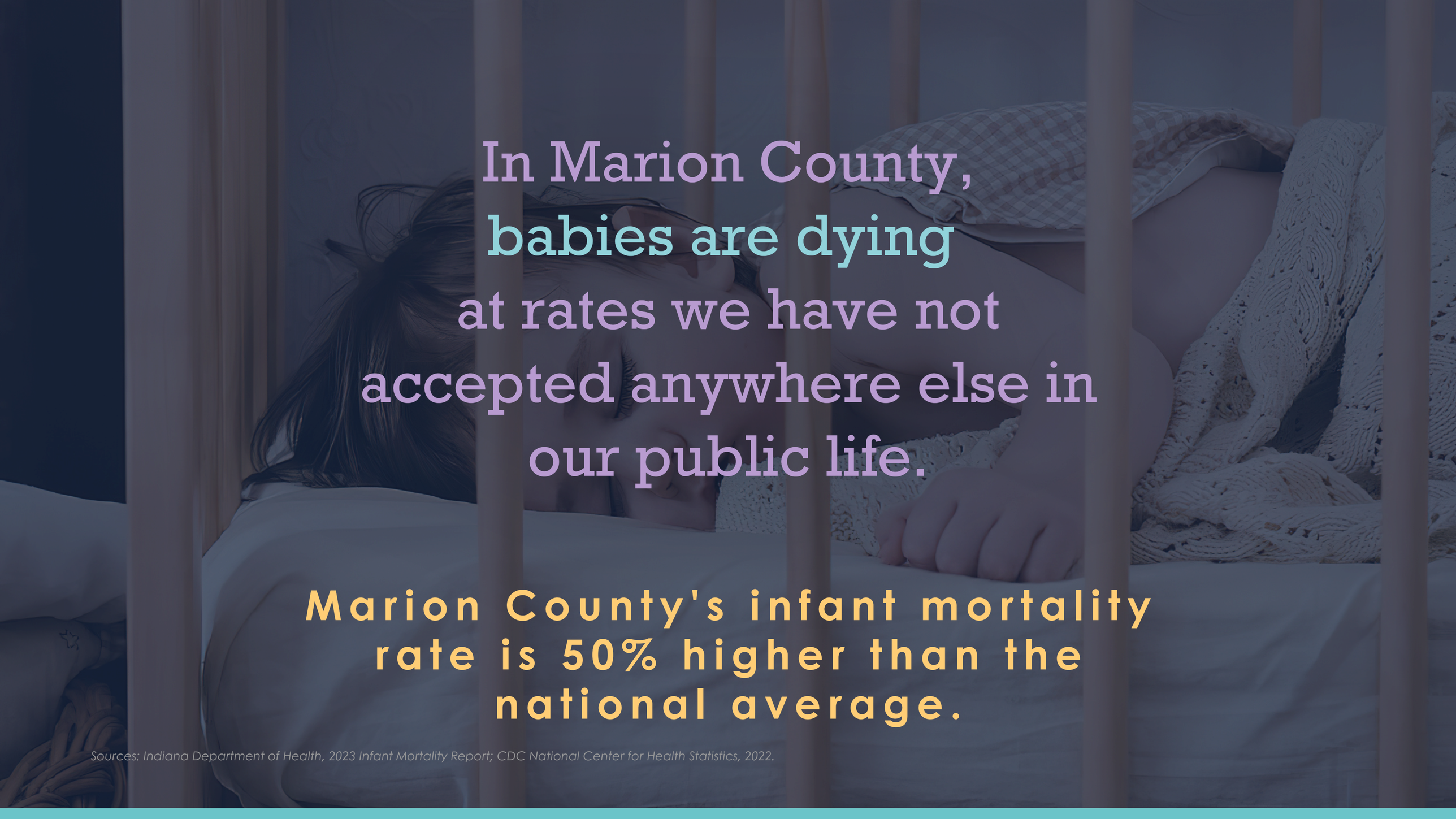
This report is not only a record of a crisis. It is also a map of what is possible. The evidence base for doula care is strong. The demand in our community is overwhelming — 97% of surveyed Marion County residents said they would welcome more support. Our partners — JUST Community, Inc., The Bridge Project, Nurse-Family Partnership, the Marion County Public Health Department, and many others — are already doing extraordinary work on the ground.

“No mother should have to build her own safety net to survive her pregnancy.”

Cradle Indy is new, and we are honest about that. But we are also built for this moment. I invite you to read this report not as a document to be filed away, but as an invitation to walk alongside us, to help us imagine, and then to help us build an Indy where every family has what they need to thrive.

Dr. Nicole Carey

Executive Director, Cradle Indy



In Marion County,
babies are dying
at rates we have not
accepted anywhere else in
our public life.

Marion County's infant mortality rate is 50% higher than the national average.

Sources: Indiana Department of Health, 2023 Infant Mortality Report; CDC National Center for Health Statistics, 2022.

WHAT THE DATA TELLS US...

Every week in Indiana, about 10 babies die before their first birthday.

In Marion County, that loss hits harder than almost anywhere else in the state.

5.6	6.3	8.4	5
deaths out of every 1,000 babies born **across the U.S.**	deaths out of every 1,000 babies born **in Indiana**	deaths out of every 1,000 babies born **in Marion County**	deaths out of every 1,000 babies born **Healthy People 2030 goal**

2020-2024

Many of those losses start with babies who are born too early or too small.

Born too early (before 37 weeks)
About **1 in 9** Indiana babies — higher than the national average.

Born too small (under 5.5 pounds)
About **1 in 12** Indiana babies — and many die because they were born too small to thrive.

In Marion County, many of the babies we lose are born weighing less than 3 pounds.

Sources: Indiana Department of Health (2025); Indiana Department of Health, 2024 Infant Mortality Report; March of Dimes 2024 Report Card; Perinatal Periods of Risk (PPOR) Marion County Report 2018-2023.

The ZIP CODE you live in shouldn't decide your baby's first birthday.

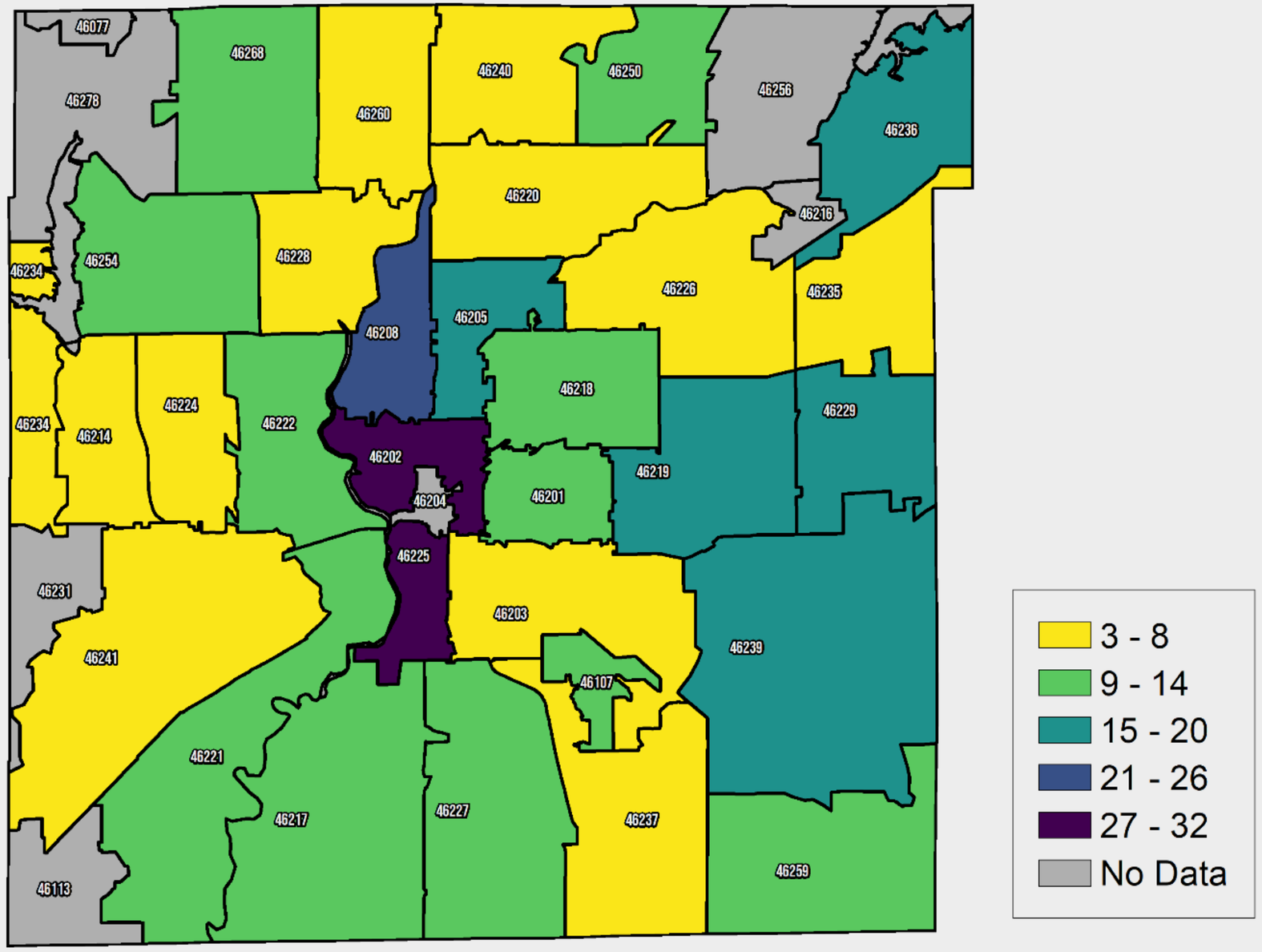
13.3	11.8	11.6	4.2
46241	46219	46218	Hamilton County

Infant deaths per 1000 live births by Marion County ZIP code (2020-2024)

Living just a 20-minute drive to the north drops the infant mortality rate by more than two-thirds.

Sources: Indiana Department of Health, 2024 Infant Mortality Report; Perinatal Periods of Risk (PPOR) Marion County Report 2018-2023.
Infant Mortality is the death of a baby before their first birthday and the number one indicator for health in a community.

IMR by ZIP Code in Marion County, 2024



We Have the Knowledge.
We Have the People.
We Have the Hospitals.
Why Are Babies Still Dying?

1. **We are working in silos.**
   Hospitals do not know what community organizations are doing. Community organizations do not know what other community organizations are doing.

2. **No one has clear data on what is working and what is not.**
   No shared system tells us what is working across communities to address all the factors needed for families to thrive.

3. **The hardest-to-reach mothers are invisible — and the barriers keeping them that way go unaddressed.**
   The mothers who need help most are the ones least visible to hospitals, clinics, and social services. They face eviction, food insecurity, no way to get to appointments, no childcare, and untreated mental health needs — and no one is addressing these social determinants of health in a coordinated way.

The problem is not lack of effort. The problem is that the effort is not coordinated.

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COLLECTIVE IMPACT IS THE ANSWER

Cradle Indy is not another service provider.
Cradle Indy is the backbone that connects every part of the system making the rest of the work work.

Mobilizing Resources

Reaching mothers no one else is reaching — through creative, community-based outreach that begins in pregnancy and continues a full year after birth.

Coordinated Collaboration

Convening hundreds of partners to stop duplicating work and start building shared strategy.

Data That Measures Impact

Sharing what is working and what is not, across organizations, so we stop guessing.

PROGRAMS WE SUPPORT

Continuous Doula Support

Doula care is one of the most rigorously studied interventions in maternal health. And it is grossly underfunded. Decades of peer-reviewed research show it reduces preterm birth, low birthweight, and postpartum depression and increases breastfeeding initiation. Cradle Indy extends doula support from **early pregnancy to a full year after birth** because the practices that protect mother and baby — breastfeeding continuation, safe sleep, well-child attendance — require sustained presence well beyond the six-week check. Indiana Medicaid and private insurance do not currently cover doula care. **Cradle Indy is filling that gap.**

Navigation, Not Duplication

Cradle Indy doesn't replicate existing services. **We find the families no one else has found** — the ones who arrive at the emergency department at 28 weeks with no prenatal care, the ones who deliver without ever seeing an OB, the ones whose first contact with the healthcare system is the labor and delivery unit. These birthing persons are largely invisible to the systems built to serve them.

Our navigators meet mothers where they are — in their homes, in their neighborhoods, in the community organizations they already trust. We connect them to the doulas, clinics, partners, and resources already doing the work. **Our value is in the ease of connection, not the duplication of services.**

Building the Village

Cradle Indy delivers community education on safe sleep, breastfeeding, and maternal mental health in the ZIP codes where infant mortality is highest — through churches, community organizations, and the everyday spaces families already trust.

We also convene **peer support circles** that connect mothers across pregnancy and the postpartum year. **Social isolation is a measurable driver of poor maternal and infant outcomes. Isolated mothers experience higher rates of postpartum depression, lower breastfeeding continuation, and increased risk of unsafe sleep practices.** For some mothers, isolation compounds the chronic stress that drives preterm birth. Peer circles build the village that makes the rest of the work possible.

Sources: Bohren et al., Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews, 2017; ACOG Committee Opinion 736, Optimizing Postpartum Care, 2018 (reaffirmed 2021); Hauck et al., Pediatrics, 2011; U.S. Surgeon General, Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation, 2023; March of Dimes 2025 Report Card; Kozhimannil et al., American Journal of Public Health, 2013; Geronimus et al., American Journal of Public Health, 2006.

Voices of the Village

This work doesn't happen alone. Thanks to the generous support of Elevance Health Foundation, Cradle Indy was able to connect more than 100 prenatal and postpartum families to doula care this past year — here is what some of those families had to say

During a time as beautiful and as vulnerable as pregnancy, don't think you are alone — there is a network to support you — Gema P.

> This having twins thing has a lot of unknowns, so any support for my babies is welcome. Thank you for this amazing resource of our doula — Jourdan I.

My doula helped me in so many ways... If she wasn't there, I can only imagine where I would have been — Malaysia H.

Year one by the numbers…

226

families connected to Cradle Indy since September 2025

115

of those families matched with a doula (approximately half of all families connected)

411

connections made to resources & referrals to partner services

50+

partnerships created to ensure every family gets basic needs met

Cradle Indy is the bridge between Marion County's maternal and infant health programs — ensuring that families touching one program get connected to all the support they need.

… and we are just getting started.

THE COLLECTIVE: BREAKING THE SILOS IN 2025

Marion County has never lacked organizations doing maternal and infant health work. What it lacked was the infrastructure to coordinate it.

Hundreds of Meetings. One Strategy.

Listening First
In the past year, Cradle Indy convened hundreds of meetings with health systems, community organizations, and public health partners to understand what is working and what is not.

Co-Designing Strategy
We focus on building capacity together rather than telling partners what to do. Strategy emerges from the people doing the work.

The Bridging the Gap Summit
In November, Cradle Indy convened the Bridging the Gap Summit — over 200 partners across health systems, community organizations, philanthropy, and public health, gathered to align on the work no single organization can do alone. The summit established the foundation for the shared strategy, shared metrics, and coordinated action that define Cradle Indy's collective impact model.

The Collective: Committed Partners

Cradle Indy is convened by the collective. In its first year, more than 50 organizations have shown up to the table — health systems, managed care entities, community organizations, public health agencies, government offices, foundations, and faith-based partners. This is what a village strategy looks like in practice.

HEALTH SYSTEMS

Ascension St Vincent · Community Health Network Eskenazi Health · Franciscan Health · Indiana University (IU) Health · Riley Children's Health

INSURANCE & MANAGED CARE

Anthem Blue Cross Blue Shield · CareSource Indiana · Managed Health Services

DOULA, MATERNAL & INFANT CARE

The Birth Fund · Dieudonne Foundation · Indiana Association for Professional Doulas · Just Community, Inc · MeLamama · Morning Star Afrocentric Wellness · Nurse Family Partnership · The Milk Bank- Indiana Diaper Bank · Not1More · The Bridge Project · Divine Transitions

INDIVIDUAL BIRTH WORKERS & COMMUNITY

Doulas · Social Workers · Community Health Workers · Navigators· Community Members with lived experience

COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS & DIRECT SERVICE

Community Alliance of the Far East Side · Covering Kids & Families · Edna Martin Christian Center · Fathers and Families · Flanner House · Indiana Hospital Association · John Boner Neighborhood Center · Moms Helpline · Shepherd Community Center · Westminster Neighborhood Services · Firefly Children & Family Alliance· Lego Love · Engaging Solutions · IU School of Medicine

PUBLIC HEALTH & GOVERNMENT

Office of US Congressman Andre Carson · City of Indianapolis · Indiana Dept of Health · Indiana General Assembly · Indiana Public Health Association · Indianapolis Public Schools · Marion County Public Health Dept · Regenstrief Institute

FQHCs

Jane Pauley Community Health Center · Raphael Health Center · HealthNet

FUNDERS & FOUNDATIONS

Women's Foundation of Indiana · Elevance Health Foundation· Riley Children's Foundation · IU Health Foundation · Indianapolis Urban League · Molina Health Care

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THE COLLECTIVE IN PRACTICE

Here are just four of dozens of organizations that are committed to collective impact to better outcomes for babies and Marion County.

Nurse-Family Partnership pairs registered nurses with first-time mothers from pregnancy through their child's second birthday, delivering evidence-based home visiting that improves pregnancy outcomes, child development, and family economic stability. Cradle Indy and NFP refer mothers between programs and coordinate care when a family needs both a doula and a sustained nurse relationship — proof that no single model fits every mother.

The Marion County Public Health Department leads local maternal and child health data collection, fatality review, and public health response across the county. MCPHD's data and expertise inform Cradle Indy's understanding of where need is greatest — ensuring that community education and outreach reach the ZIP codes most affected by infant loss.

The Bridge Project (Birth Fund) provides unconditional cash assistance to mothers in their first 1,000 days of motherhood, addressing the economic instability that drives prenatal stress, food insecurity and housing insecurity. The Bridge Project refers eligible Marion County families directly to Cradle Indy to ensure all needs are met — recognizing that no intervention works in isolation.

JUST Community provides community-rooted doula services, doula training, and community education, with deep expertise serving diverse families in Marion County. JCI is Cradle Indy's primary doula service partner, delivering the in-home, year-long support model that defines Cradle Indy's care arc — including the workforce development pipeline that sustains it.

How can you join us in the fight?

Continue to Show Up

Renew or initiate a continued presence at the Cradle Indy Advisory Committee. Send someone who can report on what's happening within your system, share thoughts honestly, and truly collaborate. The collective is only as strong as the consistency of who sits at the table.

Mobilize Your Resources

We need to get creative about tackling infant mortality. Contact us about collaborative grant-seeking, joint educational campaigns, shared procurement, and pooled advocacy. The mothers and babies of Marion County need a coordinated investment strategy, not 50 separate ones.

Fund the Movement

A single donation of $1,500 funds doula care for one family during an entire pregnancy with continuous labor and delivery support. An additional $3,000 will fund postpartum doula care for an entire year.

donate today

cradleindy.org | info@cradleindy.org

Babies thrive in the cities that collectively decide to end preventable loss.

Indianapolis could be one of them.

Will you join the fight to end infant mortality?

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So every baby in Indianapolis sees their 1st birthday.
Visit cradleindy.org to learn more.

donate today

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