



**PUBLIC HEALTH INSTITUTE  
OF WESTERN MASSACHUSETTS**

PARTNERS FOR HEALTH EQUITY

To: Commissioner Monica Bharel, Massachusetts Department of Public Health

From: Jessica Collins, Executive Director

Re: Holyoke Medical Center closing birthing center services

To Whom It May Concern:

The Public Health Institute of Western MA completed a regional Community Health Needs Assessment (CHNA) this past year. With regard to Holyoke Medical Center closing its birthing center services, we strongly encourage the Department of Public Health to undertake a health impact assessment before making any final decision on this reduction of services in Holyoke. We share specific data with you from the CHNA which underscores that maternal health is a health equity issue and an essential service for our region and Holyoke in particular.

We encourage you to consider in the health impact assessment, the following health indicators shared below, social determinants of health such as transportation, healthcare quality metrics from the past ten years, as well as employee and patient satisfaction metrics in your decision making. The decision should be based on comprehensive metrics that address health equity, not just financial or volume oriented metrics.

Below are excerpts from the 2019 Community Health Needs Assessments prepared by our office for the Coalition of Western Ma Hospitals/Insurer.

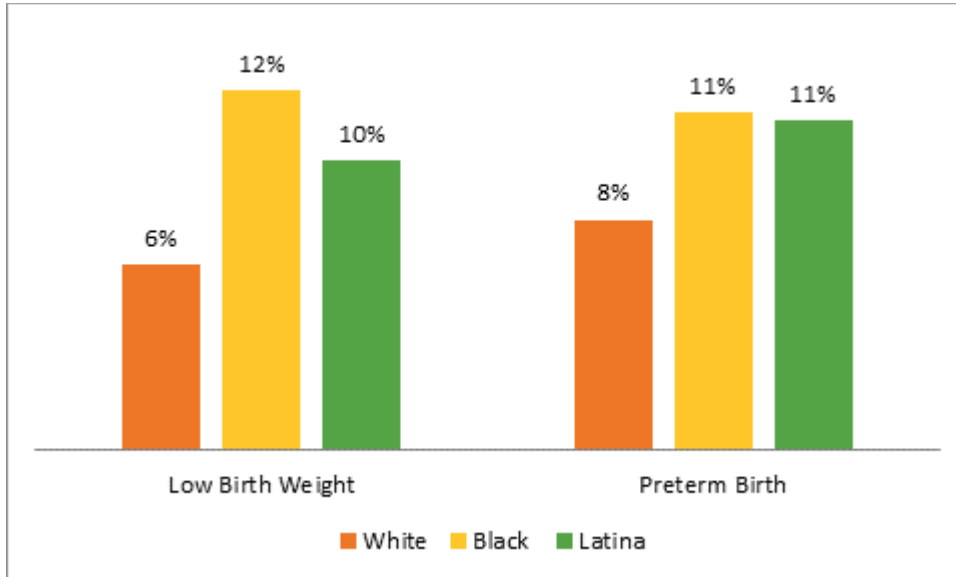
Sincerely,

Jessica Collins  
Executive Director

In Hampden County 10% of babies were born preterm (PTB) and 8% were born low birth weight (LBW). **The highest rates of low birth weight and preterm birth among Hampden County communities are in Springfield and Holyoke (MDPH, 2016).** When examining by race/ethnicity, Black women in Hampden County experience the highest rates of low birth weight, at a rate double that of White women (Figure 29). Rates of preterm birth were also higher among Black and Latina women compared to White women. Rates are also high among teens, with an estimated 13% giving birth to low birth weight babies and 12% having preterm births (MDPH, 2016).



Figure 29. Birth Outcomes by Race/Ethnicity, Hampden County



Source: MDPH, 2016.

Table 6. Less than Adequate Prenatal Care and Smoking During Pregnancy, Hampden County and Select Communities

	Less than Adequate Prenatal Care	Smoked During Pregnancy
Chicopee	19%	8%
Holyoke	20%	8%
Palmer	16%	13%
Springfield	21%	7%
Westfield	17%	9%
West Springfield	18%	5%
Hampden County	19%	7%
Massachusetts	18%	5%

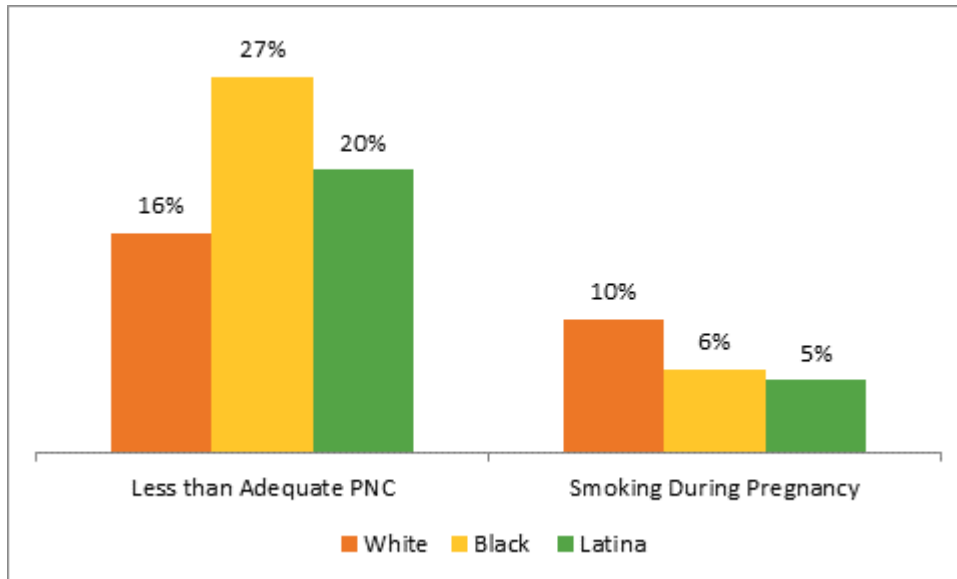
Source: MDPH, 2016. Age-adjusted per 100,000



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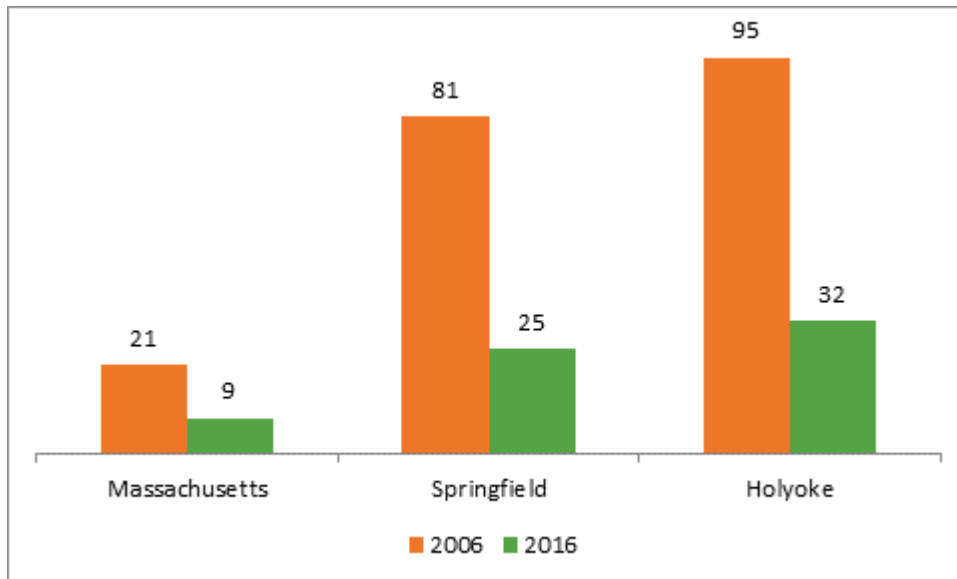
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Figure 30. Less than Adequate Prenatal Care and Smoking during Pregnancy, By Race/Ethnicity, Hampden County



Source: MDPH, 2016.

Figure 31. Teen Birth Rates in MA, Springfield, and Holyoke



Source: MDPH, 2006 and 2016. Rates are per 1,000 females age 15 – 19.