

Infant-Toddler Court Program National Resource Center

# Supporting Infants and Parents at the Nexus of Perinatal Mental Health and Child Welfare

March 29, 2024



**Safe Babies**  
A Program of ZERO TO THREE



## Infant-Toddler Court Program National Resource Center

The National Infant-Toddler Court Program was made possible through the support of the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) as part of an award totaling \$8,820,638 with 0 percent financed from non-governmental sources.

The contents are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of, nor an endorsement by, HRSA, HHS, or the U.S. Government. For more information, please visit [HRSA.gov](https://www.hrsa.gov).



# Agenda

- Brief overview of perinatal mental health and its intersection with child welfare through a dyadic lens
- Brief introduction of potential policy levers to support perinatal mental health for families in and at risk of entering the child welfare system
- Panel discussion

# Panelists



**Erin Baker-Ojeda**  
Safe Babies Community  
Coordinator, Illuminate  
Colorado



**Dr. Amanda Bird Gilmartin**  
Assistant Professor of  
Pediatrics, University of  
Colorado

Medical Director, Kids in  
Care Settings (KICS) Clinic



**Kimberly Nabarro**  
Parent Leader, Safe Babies  
at ZERO TO THREE

Parent Partner and  
Makua Ally, EPIC 'Ohana

# Perinatal Mental Health's Intersection with Child Welfare

## A dyadic approach

Infants, toddlers, and young children grow up in the context of relationships that contribute to their physical, emotional, and social well-being, and parental mental health is inextricably linked to early childhood health and development.



# Setting the Stage for Our Conversation

## Parental mental health is closely linked to the health and development of infants and young children

Many parents and caregivers experience mental health concerns, and these conditions can affect the well-being of both parents and children.

The perinatal period, which includes pregnancy through one year postpartum, is a crucial window of time to prioritize positive mental health for parents.

Maternal mental health conditions are common during pregnancy and through one year postpartum, and they can lead to significant suffering and sometimes death.

Black and American Indian/Alaska Native families face higher rates of postpartum depression and other mental health conditions due to systemic racism and barriers to accessing quality care.

Unaddressed parental mental health challenges can negatively impact birth outcomes, bonding and attachment with babies, and children's social-emotional, cognitive, and developmental outcomes.

# Setting the Stage for our Conversation

Families with child welfare involvement have higher rates of mental health conditions.

Unaddressed parental mental health challenges can increase the likelihood of child welfare involvement, whether or not maltreatment has occurred.

Increasing access to care can reduce mental health stigma and prevent the trauma of child welfare involvement.



Parental mental well-being reduces the risk of child welfare involvement

**Families are better positioned to experience mental well-being when they are well-supported with safe and healthy environments, have sufficient means to meet their basic needs, and receive early identification and access to needed services.**



# Strategies to support positive perinatal mental health and reduce risk of child welfare involvement



# Policy Recommendations

## Economic Supports

Implement policies such as tax credits and paid leave to support parents and caregivers financially during the perinatal period.

## Parent Supports

Provide peer support, doulas/birth workers, and home visiting programs to offer assistance and guidance to parents during the perinatal period.

## Medicaid Coverage

Expand Medicaid coverage and extending postpartum Medicaid coverage to ensure access to healthcare services for parents during and after pregnancy.


## Screening and Access to Services

Implement universal screening and support programs for all parents, as well as targeted screening and support for higher-risk populations, to identify and address mental health conditions.

## Training and Capacity Building in Child Welfare and Court Systems



Provide training and capacity building programs for child welfare and court systems to better understand and address the mental health needs of parents and caregivers involved in the child welfare system.

# Get the new resource



**Safe Babies**  
A Program of ZERO TO THREE

**Nurturing Development:  
Policy Strategies for Perinatal Mental Health  
to Enhance Early Childhood Well-being  
and Reduce Child Welfare Involvement**



**ZERO TO THREE**  
Early connections last a lifetime



# Panel Discussion



**Safe Babies**  
A Program of ZERO TO THREE



**ZERO TO THREE**  
Early connections last a lifetime





For questions, please  
contact Khanh Nguyen at  
[knguyen@zerotothree.org](mailto:knguyen@zerotothree.org)

# Thank You!



**Safe Babies**  
A Program of ZERO TO THREE



**ZERO TO THREE**  
Early connections last a lifetime

