

A new program called START SMART for Your Baby (SM), developed by Managed Health Services Indiana, Inc. (MHS) to help reduce low birth weight and infant mortality throughout the state of Indiana, was announced Wednesday by MHS President and Chief Executive Officer Rita Johnson-Mills.

The announcement was made at a luncheon held at St. Timothy Community Church in Gary, Indiana, and was attended by community and state leaders, physicians and other providers.

Ms. Johnson-Mills said, "Low birth weight—the leading cause of infant death—is preventable, and we at MHS are implementing START SMART for Your Baby to help overcome low birth weight among our pregnant Members. While we are pleased to report that Indiana has made noteworthy progress in lowering infant mortality and low birth weight, it did not reach the Healthy People 2000 goals for infant mortality, fetal mortality, low birth weight, percentage of prenatal care begun in first trimester and unintended pregnancies.

"We are inviting physicians, the state of Indiana, and community outreach and prenatal organizations to join with us to help prevent low birth weight."

Melinda Stone, RN, BSN, MHS Perinatal Management Case Manager, said MHS was investing more than \$100,000 throughout the remaining year on the START SMART for Your Baby program.

"The new program will strive to ensure that both MHS' pregnant Members and their physicians are supported as they strive to improve birth outcomes within their communities," Ms. Stone said. "We will link our moms-to-be with prenatal care coordination, early adequate and risk appropriate prenatal care, education and support."

Pregnant MHS Members who participate in the START SMART for Your Baby will receive incentives to attend baby showers and routine visits to their physicians, according to Ms. Stone.

"Each time a Member attends one of the scheduled baby showers, she will receive a gift for herself, have the opportunity to ask questions about her pregnancy and enjoy speaking with other women who are pregnant," she said.

"If the mom-to-be attends all of her regular visits to her doctor, she is also eligible to select a nice gift for her baby. We are also providing a diary and a calendar to each pregnant Member, both of which are packed with helpful information about how to have a healthy pregnancy and baby."

Where communities offer prenatal and parenting education, MHS will work in collaboration to link members and facilitate attendance, according to Ms. Stone.

Judith A. Ganser, M.D., M.P.H., Medical Director, CSHC/MCH, Indiana State Department of Health, said there were 84,500 births in 1999 in Indiana and 670 children died before their first birthday.

"We have areas in Lake and Marion counties where the rates of infant mortality are higher than those rates in developing countries," Dr. Ganser said. "Sometimes pregnant mothers just have problems getting to their prenatal care appointments.

We know statistically that women who get early and consistent prenatal care have healthier babies."

Dr. Ganser expressed optimism saying that some of the groundwork for combating low birth weight and infant mortality has been laid.

"Various programs and people have approached the problem," she said. "They have begun clearing the ground and improving the soil. In fact they have planted the seeds. We now have the opportunity to further work together and improve the health of pregnant women and children," she said. "It is really important that care coordination include outreach. If we wait for referrals from doctors or clinics, we miss the women who cannot get to care."

Julia Brillhart, RN, MSN, Executive Director, Indiana Perinatal Network stressed the need for communities to pull together and promote cooperation and coordination among all persons interested in improving perinatal care. The Indiana Perinatal Network is a statewide effort to ensure that mothers and babies in Indiana reach the highest achievable level of health and well being.

MHS is a managed care organization serving the Medicaid population throughout the entire state and is a subsidiary of Centene Corporation. MHS has three Indiana office locations, which are located in Indianapolis, Merrillville, and Ft. Wayne. The Indianapolis office is the headquarters for the Plan.

Centene Corporation specializes in providing services for government-supported health care programs. It has Medicaid managed health care plans in Indiana, Texas and Wisconsin.

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