Looking to the Roots: Improving Birth Outcomes in the Bronx

Anna Kapolka, Class of 2018, Woodrow Wilson School
Montefiore Medical Center, regulatory and legislative policy
Funded by CHW and the Diane K Weeks class of 1975 fund under PICS

Maternal and Child Health in the Bronx
New York City represents a microcosm of maternal and child health in the United States more broadly; poor birth outcomes relative to other developed countries, with a disparity between Manhattan (i.e. NY county) and the Bronx, with the former performing better on all measures. This is in line with the broader story of higher-income, lower minority, better-educated communities faring better than those characterized by the opposite.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Birth Outcomes*</th>
<th>USA</th>
<th>NYS</th>
<th>Best state</th>
<th>Worst State</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Maternal Mortality</td>
<td>19.9</td>
<td>18.7</td>
<td>5.8 (Massachusetts)</td>
<td>39.3 (Georgia)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infant Mortality</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>4.2 (New Hampshire)</td>
<td>9.3 (Mississippi)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Low Birth Weight</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>8.8 (Alaska)</td>
<td>11.4 (Mississippi)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preterm Births</td>
<td>9.6</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>7.3 (Vermont)</td>
<td>13.1 (Mississippi)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

About the Conceptual Framework
The framework for my final report was the Life Course Theory which emphasizes the salience of social determinants of health and seeks to understand the effects of accumulated exposure throughout an individual’s life, especially at critical periods of development and transition. Social determinants of health exclude individual risk factors such as genetics or diabetes. They encompass factors that influence health at a population level: housing, pollution, education, healthcare access, race, gender, income, etc.

What’s Driving Poor Birth Outcomes in the Bronx?
- Sociodemographic and economic characteristics
  - Highest rate of poverty in NY state
  - Highest rate of Medicaid enrollment in the State
  - Low levels of education (25% college graduates in Bronx vs. 63% in Manhattan)
  - High rates of obesity and diabetes
  - Highest rates of crowding, homelessness and building dilapidation in the city
- A study of NYC hospitals found that black mothers are more likely to deliver in hospitals ill-equipped to handle childbirth complications

Conclusion: What Now?
Healthy mothers make for smooth childbirth and healthy babies. A mother’s health is on an established track long before pregnancy - to get to the root of the problem would require improving social conditions in the Bronx.

A shorter term solution however might focus on at-risk pregnant women. NYC might take example from Boston, where the Housing Authority and the Public Health Commission partnered to offer priority housing and case management to housing-unstable pregnant women.