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Family Stories: Birth Cost Equity for Unmarried Women & Families - June 2020

ABC for Health, Inc.

July 2020

The Wisconsin Minority Health Program provides ABC for Health essential support to help reduce avoidable health disparities for unmarried, pregnant women across Wisconsin, with a particular focus in Dane and Milwaukee Counties. Our approach is to identify families in need, collect and share family stories, and conduct education and outreach on the issue of Birth Cost Recovery (BCR), the collection of Medicaid-supported birth expenses, unique to unmarried couples. Unfortunately, Wisconsin leads the nation in BCR, a policy we call the “Birth Tax,” causing stress and potentially more serious consequences to predominantly low-income and minority pregnant women and their families.

June 2020 Update:

In June, the Milwaukee County Board Committees paused, with no decision on the Resolution to discontinue the Birth Tax. We focused our time on education and information on the racial disparities and impacts of the Birth Tax in Milwaukee.



Recall, at the end of May, the Resolution requesting the Milwaukee County Department of Child Support Services discontinue the discretionary practice of pursuing birth cost recovery collections in child support cases in Milwaukee County was before the full County Board for a vote. After short discussion, the motion to refer to Committee was approved 12-6 and the issue was sent to Finance Committee Chair Haas to add the resolution to an upcoming meeting agenda.

However, when the Milwaukee County Board Committee on Finance met on Thursday, June 18, its meeting agenda did not include the Birth Tax Resolution, stalling the issue for the summer.

ABC for Health created informational materials that stressed that, in the interest of racial and social justice, Milwaukee County must eliminate this discriminatory practice. This policy is harming Milwaukee's ability to address systemic racism, reduce black infant mortality, and lift families out of poverty.

We linked to our [informational sheet](#) on the Birth Tax and its impact on Milwaukee County in our correspondence and Partner's Updates. We have compiled our research and writing on our [Birth Tax website](#). We will encourage the Finance Committee Chair to add the resolution to his July meeting agenda, and continue to inform and education on the importance of this issue.

Finally, the Resolution was added to the July Finance Committee Agenda. It is our hope that the Committee will look at the *human costs* related to Birth Tax collections, specifically the impact of the Birth Tax on low income pregnant women seeking BadgerCare Plus or Medicaid – perhaps foregoing prenatal care and health coverage because of the threat of collection against a partner, the racial disparities of women asked to comply with the policy, sanctions for pregnant women not cooperating, or the potential impact on birth outcomes.



Once action is taken in Committee, either in a recommendation to adopt or reject the Resolution, it will once again go before the full County Board of Supervisors for a vote.



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About ABC for Health

ABC for Health is a Wisconsin-based nonprofit public interest law firm dedicated to linking children and families, particularly those with special health care needs, to health care benefits and services.

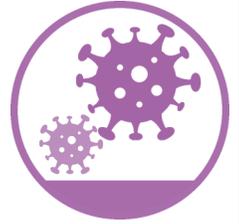
ABC for Health's mission is to provide information, advocacy tools, legal services, and expert support needed to obtain, maintain, and finance health care coverage services.

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Responsive Trainings in a Challenging Time

ABC for Health was grateful for the supplemental support through the Minority Health program that allowed us to quickly respond to community needs created by COVID-19. Drawing on ABC's expertise in health coverage, care, and service for vulnerable populations, ABC created a Pandemic Response Initiative, a high impact community education initiative directed at the health coverage of racial/ethnic minorities or tribes in Wisconsin displaced or dislocated from work because of COVID-19. ABC developed a public-facing [COVID Resources](#) webpage and YouTube [COVID Playlist](#) to its popular [YouTube Channel](#). ABC communicated regular updates to community members, service providers, attorneys, and community organizations on changing Medicaid rules and policies, federal legislation like the CARES Act, and state and federal emergency declarations, in an interactive, accessible platform. ABC staff quickly adapted and pivoted to video production techniques that allowed staff to create these products remotely and safely at home! ABC promoted the resources and content through statewide networks and a broad social media campaign.



Our COVID community education interventions connected people to the information, advocacy support, and resources to secure the health care coverage and services they needed and were entitled to. We provided education for dislocated workers and their families accessible from home or by smart phone, with an emphasis on health disparity populations dislocated from work and at risk of losing health coverage. For people with disabilities or experiencing racial and cultural discrimination the situation is even more dire. The loss of a job and therefore the family's insurance interrupts care plans, treatment regimes, or prescription needs. It makes a health condition worse. In a time of a national pandemic and public health emergency, families should not have to choose between lifesaving treatment and medical debt.



ABC posted its first COVID series video on March 10. By the first week of July, ABC added 65 more videos, watched almost 245,000 times – that's over 7300 hours watched. We made over 2.2 million impressions on YouTube – the number of times our content was displayed to individuals looking for video content/resources. Our COVID resources page has been shared with thousands of attorneys, advocates, and health care service providers across Wisconsin. New content is added to each resource every week. Here are just a few comments from the thousands we received from viewers, including, "I have been loving these videos - I have been sending them to a few of my clients with disabilities who are very affected by COVID and changing program rules. They find them really helpful!!" "Thank you for the objective and straightforward information." "Thank you for simplifying the [CARES] Act and making it easier to understand. Keep up the good work!" "Great info on COVID testing and insurance coverage. On-point information for our tool box!"



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