



## Family Stories: Birth Cost Equity for Unmarried Women & Families - December 2019

ABC for Health, Inc.

January 2020

### December 2019 Accomplishments

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.

December was a busy month for this project! We devoted substantial effort to grant deliverables, thanks to both policy and educational opportunities that presented themselves in a very short amount of time. The majority of this time was spent responding to requests for information from advocates, policy makers, and county leadership as they evaluated the BCR policy, and preparing for a public hearing in Milwaukee called by a Committee of the County Board.

### December Deliverables:



Talking to Families about BCR



Responding to Requests for Information



Building a New Website, Updating Web Content



Speaking to County Board Officials/Hearings



Growing a List of Partners, Mailing List



Preparing Educational Video Content



Compiling Family Stories



Continuing Pro Bono Legal Assistance

### Recent County Success

- ✓ Dane County has eliminated birth cost recovery collections. Effective January 1, 2020, Dane County will no longer collect birth costs from families whose birth was funded by Medicaid. This was a huge success, one other counties across Wisconsin can emulate.
- ✓ ABC spoke with officials in multiple counties after sharing the news of Dane County's success. This led to an invitation to testify before a Committee of the Milwaukee County Board to encourage them to eliminate the practice in Milwaukee. The hearing is scheduled for January.



## ABC FOR HEALTH

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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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## Featured Family Story

*The information below represents a service encounter by ABC for Health.  
The facts were de-identified to preserve confidentiality.*



### Julie's Story

Julie, pregnant with her first child, did not have health coverage but appeared eligible for BadgerCare Plus. But applying for coverage raised her concerns about Birth Cost Recovery. Julie was not married to the baby's father, and the situation was complicated. Julie was afraid of the baby's father, having suffered past abuse. She knew that because she was not married, Birth Cost Recovery could mean the baby's father would get a summons to a child support and birth cost recovery hearing if he were identified on the BadgerCare Plus application. Julie did not know that there were "good cause exemptions," which would allow her to apply for BadgerCare Plus *without* having to disclose paternity. The threats of violence and harm Julie was experiencing were the very type of devastating situations envisioned in the good cause exemption policy. ABC for Health's Advocate talked to Julie about the good cause process, possible sanctions if she did not name the father (and no exemption were granted), and other eligibility rules in BadgerCare Plus. Julie was granted a good cause exemption, relieving an extra layer of stress and fear. ABC's Advocate then worked with Julie and her local income maintenance consortium once her baby was born to make sure the baby's BadgerCare Plus coverage was active and covered the baby's first bills.

### Visit our Birth Tax Webpage:

<https://www.safetyweb.org/healthwatchwi/birth-tax.html>

### Keeping Momentum into 2020:

- ✓ Moving into 2020, we will use the success of Dane County as a model for other counties to emulate.
- ✓ Despite the victory in Dane County, there is still much more work to do! Some families still have outstanding BCR judgments and collection actions that remain from previous years. We hope to identify ways to eliminate this burden.
- ✓ ABC will testify in January at the Milwaukee County Board Committee Hearing on BCR, and will share stories and reflections of that testimony.
- ✓ ABC will include a free, on-demand workshop on Birth Cost Recovery at the 13th Annual HealthWatch WI Conference this coming March! Over 100 health care providers, advocates, HMOs, members of the faith community, & students will gather for a conference focused on social justice and health equity issues.
- ✓ ABC will continue to spread stories of families impacted by BCR to diverse audiences with accessible videos and materials. ABC will coordinate with OMH to potentially post/share materials on its website as well!

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