

Governor Mike Pence
Indiana Infant Mortality Summit
November 1, 2013
Remarks as Prepared for Delivery

Thank you, State Health Commissioner Dr. Bill VanNess for that introduction and for your leadership on taking steps to lower Indiana's infant mortality rate. I am confident that with your continued guidance and that of your staff as well as of those in this room—community, health and technology partners, policymakers, educators, and faith and community leaders—Indiana will be successful in finding a solution to this critical issue.

Today's summit strives to bring together some of the best and brightest minds from across the state to reduce Indiana's infant mortality rate, stagnant at 7.7 infant deaths per 1,000 and earning Indiana a current ranking of a deplorable 45th among 51 U.S. jurisdictions. This statistic is devastating for Hoosier families and unacceptable to our administration, which is why I have made it a top priority for the Indiana State Department of Health to address. Our goal is to improve the health, safety and well-being of Hoosiers and their families across the state. When it comes to infant mortality, Indiana must do better.

That's where you come in. You know firsthand the tragedy of infant mortality, understand its causes, and are uniquely qualified to bring to the table experiences and insights that will help us help all Hoosiers. The sessions and discussions that take place today will help lay the groundwork for change as part of Indiana's infant mortality campaign, an effort I wholeheartedly support.

Those who know me well know that I am a long-time advocate for strong and healthy families. I speak often of my Roadmap for Indiana, which includes specific goals targeted toward improving the health, safety and well-being of Hoosiers and their families. Infant mortality is considered the number one indicator of health status worldwide. Yet Indiana consistently ranks worse than the national average and goals.

The urgency and importance with which we view and treat this issue cannot be overstated. The Indiana State Department of Health has laid out key performance indicators to deliver results and reduce the rate of infant mortality. This plan includes steps to reduce prenatal smoking, low birth weight, and deaths from Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS).

We know that smoking while pregnant is a key indicator for infant death, premature births and low birth weight. In Indiana, 17.1 percent of women smoke while pregnant. The Indiana Department of Health will be tackling this issue, along with expanding efforts to inform parents of the dangers of unsafe sleep, improve access to better infant nutrition, and help ensure safe transport of women in labor to the care they need, through delivery and as they embark on motherhood.

As a state, we have the potential to improve the lives and health of Hoosiers in all corners of Indiana. Today's event will serve to generate discussion and ideas in order to protect the youngest among us. I applaud all in attendance today for their commitment to lower the rate of infant mortality in Indiana.

With your help, we will create an environment in which Hoosiers can live, grow and thrive throughout their entire lives.