



Social drivers of infant mortality

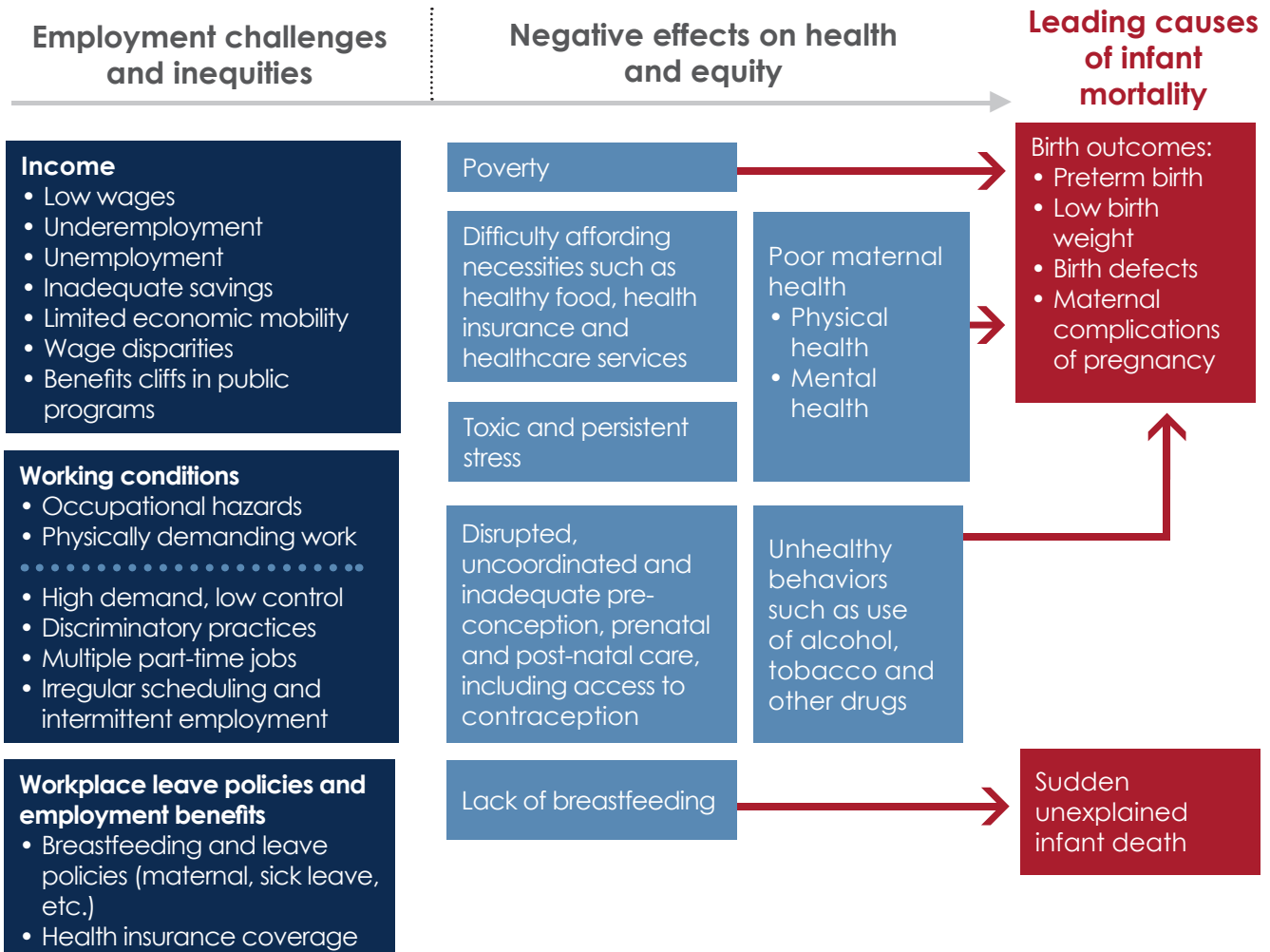
EMPLOYMENT ACTION GUIDE

Why is action needed?

Employment that pays a self-sustaining wage and offers health insurance and other benefits can pave the way for good health and positive birth outcomes. Conversely, unemployment during pregnancy is associated with lower birth weight and higher rates of infant mortality.¹ Employment is connected to overall health and well-being in several ways:²

- Income generated from employment enables access to healthy food, safe housing, healthcare services and other resources that promote health. Higher income is also associated with better mental health.
- Working conditions, including the physical environment, the type of work performed, the level of flexibility and control employees have to complete their work, and discrimination in the workplace can cause work-related stress and affect health. Work that is physically strenuous may improve health through increased physical activity but can also put workers at increased risk of illness, injury and/or disability, particularly for people with other medical conditions.
- Workplace policies and employment benefits, including health insurance coverage, paid time off, predictable scheduling and breastfeeding support, can influence the health of employees and their family members.

Figure 1. Relationship between employment and infant mortality



Source: HPIO "A new approach to reduce infant mortality and achieve equity: Policy recommendations to improve housing, transportation, education and employment" (2017)

The Health Policy Institute of Ohio (HPIO) recently produced the [Social Drivers of Infant Mortality: Recommendations for Action and Accountability in Ohio](#) report (“Action and Accountability” report) as an update to the 2017 report “[A New Approach to Reduce Infant Mortality and Achieve Equity](#).” This action guide takes a closer look at the employment recommendations in the Action and Accountability report and provides state and local health stakeholders with additional information and tools to support next steps. You can use this guide and additional tools posted on the [HPIO website](#) to prioritize, advocate for and implement the recommendations.

This action guide includes:

- **Key terms** related to the employment sector
- **Employment recommendations** from the Action and Accountability report that can be implemented at either the state or local level, as well as implementation examples from other states and Ohio communities
- **Recent policy activity at the state and local levels**, including relevant decisions that have been implemented or under consideration
- **A list of key partners**, as well as information about community engagement and cross-sector collaboration
- **Data for action**, including relevant sources of employment data
- **Relevant resources** for additional information

Key terms

- **Benefits cliff.** Occurs when public benefits, such as medical, food or child care assistance, rapidly decrease or end as a result of increased income, but income has not increased enough for the household to become self-sustaining.
- **Disaggregated data.** Data that can be broken out by demographic characteristics, such as race and ethnicity, economic status and region.
- **Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC).** An income tax credit that increases income and employment, improves maternal and infant health and improves financial stability for workers with low to moderate incomes. The federal EITC is refundable, meaning workers receive the full credit amount, regardless of taxes owed. Ohio’s EITC is 30% of the federal credit amount and is not refundable.
- **Employment discrimination.** Unfair treatment, harassment, denial of a reasonable workplace change, improper questions about or disclosure of genetic or medical information and retaliation based on the employee race, color, religion, sex (including pregnancy, gender identity and sexual orientation), national origin, disability, age (age 40 or older) or genetic information.
- **Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA).** A foundational federal labor standards law that established the minimum wage, overtime pay, youth employment standards and other employment standards for both private and public sector employment.
- **Federal Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA).** Federal law that requires employers with 50 or more employees to offer unpaid leave for certain family and medical reasons without disenrolling the employee from the employer-sponsored insurance while on leave.
- **Federal poverty level (FPL).** Established by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services each year, FPL is an income guideline based on family size that determines eligibility for various federal and state programs.
- **Labor force participation rate.** The proportion of people (ages 16 and older) who are working or actively looking for work.
- **Ohio Fair Hiring Act.** Prohibits public employers in Ohio from including any questions about the criminal background of an applicant on a job application.
- **Ohio Works First.** The financial assistance portion of Ohio’s Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) program, which provides cash benefits to families that are income-eligible for up to 36 months (3 years).
- **Publicly Funded Child Care (PFCC) or child care subsidies.** An income-based child care assistance program that helps qualifying families pay for child care services for children under age 13 and children with disabilities up to age 18.
- **Self-sufficient wage.** Income that meets the household’s basic needs and enables the household to pay for healthy food, medical care services, safe housing, child care and other resources that promote health.
- **State minimum wage.** The lowest amount an employer is required by law to pay an employee per hour. For non-tipped employees, it is \$10.10 per hour, and for tipped employees, it is \$5.05 per hour in Ohio.
- **Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF).** A federal block grant program provided to all states and the District of Columbia to support families with low-incomes in a variety of ways, including providing cash assistance for families with children experiencing poverty.

\$ Employment goals and recommendations

HPIO's [Social Drivers of Infant Mortality Advisory Group](#) prioritized the following policy goals and recommendations to improve employment for families most at risk of infant mortality. See the [Action and Accountability report](#) for more information about the process of selecting the goals and recommendations. The goals below are numbered 8 and 9 from that report.

Goal 8. Increase access to work supports

Structure public and private benefits to help families with young children advance in their careers and reach self-sufficiency.

Recommendations	Implementation examples
<i>State recommendations</i>	
<p>8.1. Child care subsidies. State policymakers can increase initial eligibility for child care subsidies (i.e., publicly funded child care) to 200% of the federal poverty level (FPL), providing access to child care for more families with low- and moderate-incomes.</p>	<p>Pennsylvania's Initial eligibility for child care subsidies is 200% FPL. In 2022, Pennsylvania increased its state budget allocation for child care by \$25 million, enabling access for an additional 161,000 children. The state also now allows families to continue receiving subsidies up to 300% FPL.</p>
<p>8.2. Benefits phase-outs. State policymakers can review eligibility levels for government programs to remove disincentives to job attainment and wage increases ("benefits cliff"). Eligibility levels for benefits programs should be structured to support families on their journey to self-sufficiency.</p>	<p>Massachusetts made changes to its TANF program in 2019 to ease transitions to work and enable families to begin building financial assets. The state increased the cash asset limit from \$2,000 to \$5,000 per household and began disregarding 100% of TANF participants' income for six months when it falls below 200% FPL.</p>
<p>8.3. Employer-sponsored child care supports. State policymakers can incentivize employers to provide child care subsidies to their employees in order to remove barriers to employment for parents, particularly those with part-time and/or low-wage jobs.</p>	<p>Georgia provides tax credits to employers who provide or sponsor child care for their employees.</p>

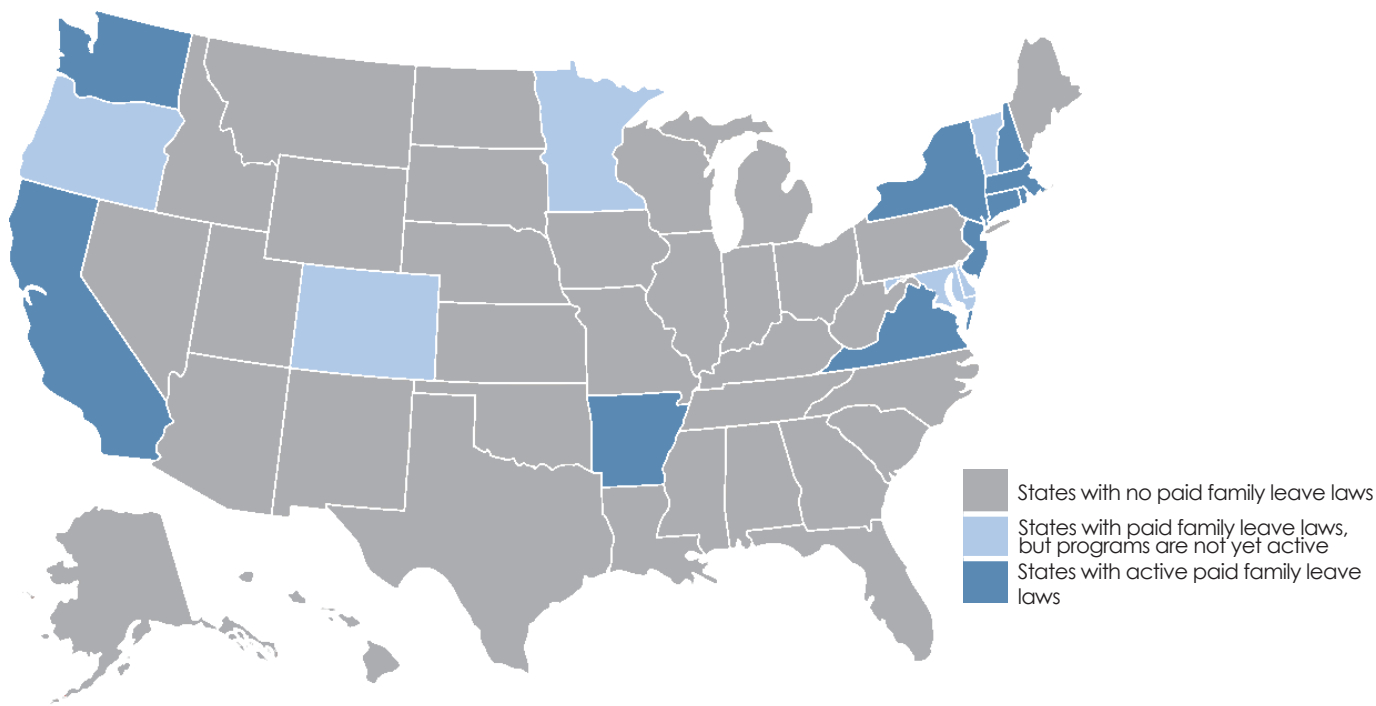
Goal 9. Adopt more robust leave policies and employment benefits

Cultivate public and private workplaces that provide flexibility and support for pregnant women and families with young children.

Recommendations	Implementation examples
<i>State and local recommendations</i>	
<p>9.1. Flexible workplace benefits. State and local policymakers can offer low-cost incentives, such as awarding extra points during contracting processes, to employers who offer benefits including paid family leave, sick leave and work schedule predictability and/or flexibility.</p>	<p>Oregon is the only state that requires predictive scheduling. Employees must receive work schedules 14 days in advance, be given a "good faith" scheduling estimate upon hiring and can refuse to work shifts within 10 hours of each other. This applies to employers with at least 500 employees in the hospitality, food service and retail industries.</p>

Recommendations	Implementation examples
State and local recommendations (cont.)	
<p>9.2. Paid family leave. State and local policymakers can expand paid family leave benefits to 12 weeks or more and eliminate or mitigate the impact of waiting periods to access paid leave for public employees.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Newburgh Heights in Cuyahoga County offers 6 months of paid parental leave to full-time public employees. • New Jersey has a paid family leave law through which residents can access 12 weeks of paid parental leave cash benefits. • Sixteen states and the District of Columbia have paid family leave laws³, as shown in figure 2.
<p>9.3. Living wage standard. State and local policymakers can increase the minimum wage paid to public employees to a self-sufficient wage, creating an example for private-sector employers to follow.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cincinnati requires a living wage for all full-time city employees and full and part-time employees of most contractors providing or delivering services to the city. The living wage amount is adjusted annually. • Cleveland passed its Fair Employment Wage Ordinance in 2000, which requires a higher minimum wage for city employees and certain contracting employers.
<p>9.4. Breastfeeding supports. State and local policymakers can prohibit employers, primarily those offering part-time, classified and/or low-wage work, from discriminating against employees who breastfeed and require supports, such as paid breaks to express milk.</p>	<p>Illinois's Nursing Mothers in the Workplace Act requires employers to provide paid breaks for breastfeeding and make reasonable efforts to provide a room or other location near the work area, other than a toilet stall, where an employee can express milk in privacy.</p>

Figure 2. States with paid family leave laws



Source: Bipartisan Policy Center. As of January 2023



Prioritizing recommendations for action

The goals and recommendations above address significant employment challenges across Ohio. To make progress on these goals, you can work with partners in your community, including those affected and at risk of experiencing infant mortality, to identify which recommendations you will prioritize for action. When selecting recommendations on which to act, you can consider which goals will have the largest impact, are most important to advance equity and are feasible given the policy landscape and existing initiatives.

For more guidance on selecting recommendations on which to act, see the [Recommendations Worksheet](#).



Recent policy activity

Policymakers at the state and local level are engaged in addressing Ohio's employment challenges. This section provides information on recent state and local policy activity related to the recommendations above.

2024-2025 State Operating Budget (House Bill 33)

If enacted as proposed by the Governor, **this budget** would:

- Increase eligibility for publicly funded child care to 160% of the federal poverty level (FPL) for initial eligibility.
- Earmark \$2.5 million in each fiscal year for the Infant Vitality fund to support programming at the community level that invests in maternal health programs and provides services for pregnant mothers to improve both maternal and infant health outcomes. This program will support breastfeeding and care coordination for mothers and babies.
- Require that the Parental Leave Benefit Fund be used to make payments to employees eligible for parental leave benefits and appropriate additional amounts at the discretion of the Office of Budget and Management Director.
- Eliminate, for eligible state employees, the 14-day unpaid waiting period and triple the paid parental leave period, resulting in a total of 12 weeks of parental leave paid at the current rate of 70% of the employee's base rate of pay.

Enacted legislation from the 133rd and 134th General Assemblies (2019-2022)

- **House Bill (HB) 110 (134th GA):** Allocated 11.3% more state general revenue fund (GRF) funding to the Ohio Civil Rights Commission, which works to reduce discriminatory workplace practices. The intention of this funding increase was to fill vacant positions to handle an expected increase in enforcement staff workload (due to new filing requirements from HB 352).
- **House Bill 110 (134th GA):** Increased the limit for publicly funded child care subsidies to 142% FPL.
- **House Bill 62 (133rd GA):** Increased the state EITC from 10% to 30% of the federal EITC amount and removed the income cap.

Local decisions

Local governments and organizations can support mothers, families and babies and reduce infant mortality through employment supports, such as promoting job training and skill development programs or collaborating with local employers to promote family-friendly workplace policies. Senate Bill 331, passed in 2017, states that "no political subdivision shall establish a minimum wage rate different from the wage rate required under this section," preempting local governments from setting their own minimum wage rates. However, many cities and localities legally challenged these new rules and found ways to circumnavigate them by increasing the minimum wage for all city or county employees in order to lead by example. Many other local employers are also voluntarily setting higher thresholds.

For additional examples of relevant local decisions being made in Ohio and across the country, refer to the goals and recommendations section above.



Advocating for change at the state and local levels

Advocacy plays an important role in creating policy change to improve community outcomes. There are many forms of advocacy, including educating and building relationships with policymakers, creating and convening a coalition, and lobbying for change to legislation. Anyone can advocate for state and local policy changes that improve employment, reduce infant mortality and achieve equity, including the recommendations above.

For more information and guidance on advocacy, see the [Advocacy Worksheet](#).



Collaboration with key partners

There are many vital and complex intertwining systems and factors that contribute to improving access to self-sustaining employment opportunities. Intentional, innovative collaboration with a variety of partners across public and private sectors make it possible to increase workforce participation, amplify efforts and make progress on the prioritized recommendations. Collaboration also allows partners to specialize. Your organization alone does not need to take on every recommendation above but can instead partner with others to strategically allocate resources, remove barriers and coordinate efforts.

Federal, state and local experts from the following entities are vital to Ohio workers and well positioned to strengthen and remove barriers to self-sufficient employment opportunities:

Federal

- **Equal Employment Opportunities Commission (EEOC):** Monitors and enforces anti-discrimination laws.
- **U.S. Department of Commerce:** Promotes job creation and economic development, in addition to enforcing laws for American businesses and workers.
- **U.S. Department of Education:** Oversees and monitors the nation's education policies; administers and coordinates most federal assistance to education; and collects data on schools.
- **U.S. Department of Health and Human Services:** Provides health and human services, including in medicine, research, public health and social services.
- **U.S. Department of Labor:** Implements laws and regulations that support the welfare and working conditions of wage earners, job seekers, and retirees; advances opportunities for profitable employment; and assures work-related benefits and rights.

State

- **BroadbandOhio:** Coordinates efforts to bring high-speed internet access to every Ohioan and strengthen the broadband network in Ohio.
- **Ohio Department of Education (ODE):** Oversees Ohio's public primary and secondary education system (612 public school districts, 49 joint vocational school districts and 362 charter schools); monitors early learning programs and private schools; and administers grant programs to support local initiatives.
- **Governor's Office of Workforce Transformation (OWT):** Connects Ohio's business, training and education sectors to create opportunities for Ohioans to expand their skills and advance their careers. OWT also provides opportunities for older students to get job training for in-demand and high paying jobs by supporting career centers, apprenticeship programs and tech-focused schools.
- **Individual Microcredential Assistance Program (IMAP):** Helps Ohioans with low incomes and who are partially or totally unemployed obtain industry-recognized credentials at no cost.
- **Ohio Chamber of Commerce:** Advocates for and provides resources to Ohio businesses, as well as champions free enterprise, economic competitiveness and growth.
- **Ohio Civil Rights Commission:** Enforces and investigates charges of discrimination in public and private employment settings, including discrimination around the hiring process, terms and conditions of work, harassment, discipline and termination.
- **Ohio Department of Commerce:** Regulates and enforces the state's business and commerce laws with a focus on consumer protection, as well as issues licenses, permits, registrations and certifications in several professions, industries and commercial enterprises.
- **Ohio Department of Development (ODD):** Oversees the state economic development, including **strategic economic investments**, the **Minority Business Development Division**, **Community Service**, **Governor's Office of Appalachia**, **TourismOhio** and **research** related to Ohio's workforce, as well as administers funding for housing and homelessness programs.
- **Ohio Department of Higher Education (ODHE):** Oversees higher education (public universities, regional campuses, community colleges and adult workforce and education centers) and manages state-funded financial aid programs.
- **Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS):** Administers Ohio's public assistance, workforce development, unemployment compensation, child and adult protective services, adoption, child care and child support programs.
- **State licensure boards:** Have the authority to license, discipline and regulate members of a profession, as well as the ability to adjust licensure requirements.

Local, regional and private sector

- **Business advisory councils:** Required for all Ohio school districts and educational service centers, these partnerships between business and education leaders aim to include more relevant and work-based student learning opportunities and make the education system more responsive to regional economic drivers and needs.
- **City and county governments:** Responsible for creating and enforcing local-level policy within state and federal regulations.
- **Community action agencies:** Receive federal, state and local funding to implement programs designed to alleviate poverty, including job training.
- **Employers:** Important partners in career training and workforce development.
- **Institutions of higher education:** Provide postsecondary education and other resources for students to reach their academic and career goals.
- **Joint vocational school districts (JVSD):** Plan and provide career technical education for students within member local school districts. Schools administered by JVSDs are often referred to as career centers.
- **Legal Aid Clinics:** Provide free legal assistance for people with low incomes with qualifying legal issues such as eligibility for public benefits, educational problems, sealing of criminal records, consumer issues, housing and evictions, domestic relations issues, tax problems, immigration and anti-discrimination suits.
- **Local departments of job and family services (LDJFS):** Oversee need-based public assistance programs at the county level, including medical and food assistance, child care subsidies, workforce development and unemployment support.
- **Local workforce development initiatives and organizations** focused on increasing workforce participation and providing post-secondary training. Examples include employee assistance programs and career and job help centers.
- **Ohio technical centers (OTCs):** Responsible for providing postsecondary career-technical education to adult students, including technical skill trades. (Overseen by the Ohio Department of Higher Education)
- **OhioMeansJobs centers:** Offer vital support to people seeking employment including job search assistance, job recruitment and job training.
- **Philanthropic organizations:** Use donations and other assets to support various causes.



Cross-sector collaboration

Health stakeholders can use the following best practices to develop productive partnerships with organizations in the employment sector:

- Follow partners online:** Sign up to receive email newsletters and review materials from partners (blog posts, publications, reports, etc.).
- Find out what motivates them:** Learn about what might motivate other organizations to partner with you. Gather information about the goals, priorities, constraints and opportunities they face so that you can identify potential areas for mutually beneficial collaboration.
- Build relationships:** Relationships are foundational for any sustainable partnership. Take time to build trust and a positive rapport with community members and potential partner organizations.
- Let them know how you can help them:** Rather than telling potential partners how they can help you, focus on the resources and expertise you bring to the table and how partnership could benefit their mission or bottom line.
- Use effective messaging:** Keep your communications concise and simple, with a clear understanding of your audience and objective. Avoid using jargon and acronyms that may not be known outside of your organization/sector.

Community engagement

It is also important to engage community members when selecting, advocating for and implementing the employment recommendations in this guide. Community members have first-hand experience that can guide your work on how to best implement the recommendations and benefit the most people. Considerations for engaging community members include:

- Build relationships and trust early in the planning process.** Establish strong connections and trust early in the planning process to avoid pitfalls or missed opportunities later.
- Extend and share power.** Invite and involve people from communities most at risk for infant mortality in each aspect of decision-making, including making sure they have the background information needed to fully participate.
- Recognize current and historical community context.** Be aware of successes and challenges from previous engagement efforts, including prior issues or conflicts that may have contributed to ongoing mistrust and disengagement. Understand that rebuilding trust may take time, and the profound effect that racism and other forms of discrimination have had on communities.
- Resolve barriers to engagement.** Assess and address any barriers that may prevent community members from participating in engagement efforts, including safe and accessible meeting locations, accessible meeting times, compensation and the provision of meals, child care and/or transportation.

For more guidance on collaboration with key partners, see the [Coalition-building worksheet](#).



Data for action

Effective use of data can strengthen efforts to implement the employment recommendations. Data makes it possible to:

- **Understand and prioritize:** Review existing data to better understand the scope, trends and inequities in employment challenges. These insights can inform prioritization of specific goals and recommendations.
- **Advocate:** Pair data with stories to effectively communicate about the need for policy change.
- **Monitor:** Transparently share data as a tool to monitor change and hold decision makers accountable for progress.
- **Evaluate and improve:** Assess the impact of policy change over time and make adjustments to strengthen effectiveness, focusing on equitable outcomes with disaggregated data.

Figure 3 provides a list of relevant employment indicators and data sources.

Figure 3. **Employment indicators and data sources**

Indicator	Description	Source	Available breakouts
Unemployment	Percent of people who are jobless, looking for a job and available for work	U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey	Race and ethnicity, disability, county, census tract
Labor force participation	Percent of people, ages 16 and older, who are in the labor force	U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey	Race, age, sex, poverty status, disability, county, census tract
Poverty	Percent of people in households with incomes below the federal poverty level	U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey	Age, race and ethnicity, disability, county, census tract
Employer sponsored health insurance (available for children and adults)	Percent of Ohioans, ages 0-18 or 19 and older, who are enrolled in employer-sponsored health insurance plans	Ohio Medicaid Assessment Survey	Age, race and ethnicity, disability, county
Median household income	Median income of Ohio households in inflation-adjusted dollars	U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey	Age, race and ethnicity, disability, county, census tract
Child care cost burden	Cost of child care for a household with two children as a percent of median household income	County Health Rankings	County
Problems paying bills during pregnancy	Percent of Ohioans with a live birth in the last 12 months who reported problems paying bills	Ohio Pregnancy Assessment Survey	Age, race and ethnicity, disability, county type, insurance status

Indicator	Description	Source	Available breakouts
Self or partner lost job during pregnancy	Percent of Ohioans with a live birth in the last 12 months reported themselves or their partner losing their jobs	Ohio Pregnancy Assessment Survey	Age, race and ethnicity, disability, county type, insurance status
Gender pay gap	Women's median earnings in cents, compared to every dollar (100 cents) of men's median earnings	County Health Rankings	County

\$ State plans and initiatives

The following state plans and initiatives are relevant to the Action and Accountability recommendations:

- [Ohio's 2020-2023 WIOA Combined State Plan](#) influences how Ohio invests in its education and training programs as well as how it promotes career pathways to students within the K-12 system. It includes an "In-Demand Jobs List" that identifies sectors and occupations with greater than average projected job openings or growth and median wages equal to or greater than 80% of Ohio's median wage.
- The [final report](#) of the Governor's Office of Children's Initiatives Eliminating Disparities in Infant Mortality Task Force includes recommendations and action steps related to economic stability for Black families.
- The [2020-2022 State Health Improvement Plan](#) includes strategies to reduce poverty in Ohio.
- The [COVID-19 Ohio Minority Health Strike Force Blueprint](#) includes recommendations to reduce poverty, increase investment and employment, and improve working conditions.
- The Ohio Chamber of Commerce's [Blueprint for Ohio's Economic Future](#) provides strategies for economic growth and improvement in Ohio focused on education and workforce, sense of place, taxes and cost, business friendliness, innovation and collaboration and infrastructure.
- The [2020 Adult Learner Working Group report](#), pioneered by ODHE, recommends strategies to improve adult learners' enrollment in and completion of higher education.
- [Ohio's 2023-2026 State Plan on Aging](#) provides strategies to improve financial stability.

To learn more

For more information and tools related to improving employment policy, see the following:

- [What Works to Increase Self-Sufficient Employment](#), Health Policy Institute of Ohio
- [Introduction to Benefits Cliffs and Public Assistance Programs](#), National Conference of State Legislators
- [Rise Together: A Blueprint for Reducing Poverty in Franklin County](#), Franklin County Commissioners
- [Addressing Benefits Cliffs](#), National Conference of State Legislators
- [Recruiting Special Populations into Career-Technical Education Toolkit](#), Ohio Department of Education

Notes

1. Scharber, Helen. "Does Out of Work Get into the Womb? Exploring the Relationship between Unemployment and Adverse Birth Outcomes?" *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*. 55, no. 3 (2014): 266-282. doi: 10.1177/0022146514543799
2. How Does Employment – or Unemployment – Affect Health? Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, March 2013. http://www.rwjf.org/content/dam/farm/reports/issue_briefs/2013/rwjf403360
3. State Paid Family Leave Laws Across the U.S. Accessed May 26, 2023. <https://bipartisanpolicy.org/explainer/state-paid-family-leave-laws-across-the-u-s/>



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