



NEWS RELEASE

# Merck Expands Safer Childbirth Cities Initiative to 20th Community-Led Project Advancing Maternal Health Equity During Black Maternal Health Week

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KENILWORTH, N.J.--(BUSINESS WIRE)-- Merck (NYSE: MRK), known as MSD outside the United States and Canada, announced today the funding support of its 20th community-based project in the Safer Childbirth Cities initiative aimed at fostering solutions that will help U.S. cities become safer, more equitable places to give birth. The expansion of the program, launched by Merck for Mothers, Merck's global initiative to help create a world where no woman has to die giving life, comes at an important moment during Black Maternal Health Week occurring April 11 – 17, 2021. The annual week, founded and led by the Black Mamas Matter Alliance, is centered on deepening the conversation and community-led solutions to improve Black maternal health outcomes in the U.S.

The newest Safer Childbirth Cities grant to the Austin Community Foundation as fiscal sponsor for the Black Mamas Community Collective, supports a project to directly tackle racial inequities in maternal health outcomes and increase access to quality care for Black mothers and their families in Austin, TX. The project will be implemented by the Maternal Health Equity Collaborative (MHEC), which centers Black Women and Women of Color — both in leading the collaborative and in the work they do in and with the community. The MHEC is made up of four doula organizations, Black Mamas ATX, Giving Austin Labor Support, Healing Hands Community Doula Project and Mama Sana Vibrant Woman and two parental support organizations, Hand to Hold and Partners in Parenting.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Black, American Indian and Alaska Native women are two to three times more likely to die from pregnancy-related causes than White women. Data from a **2020 study** by the Texas Department of State Health Services shows a similar trend in Texas where Black women are disproportionately impacted by maternal mortality and 89% of all pregnancy-related deaths in the state could

have been prevented. Merck for Mothers is committed to programs like Safer Childbirth Cities that bring local resources to communities such as Austin, TX in order to address the root causes of this disparity, including community factors and the social determinants of health that contribute to poor maternal health outcomes.

“Elevating Black and other historically marginalized voices, community leadership and local health solutions is a fundamental part of helping to reverse the health inequity that has persisted across the U.S. and globally,” said Kenneth C. Frazier, chairman and chief executive officer, Merck. “We are proud to add a 20th community-led project through the Safer Childbirth Cities initiative as part our company’s ongoing work to catalyze a future where health care is available to all.”

The Safer Childbirth Cities initiative announced a second cohort of grantees in January 2021, expanding the impact of the program to organizations located in U.S. cities with a high burden of maternal mortality and morbidity. With the newest grant, the MHEC will add culturally-sensitive and comprehensive perinatal childcare services to compliment the wraparound community doula support of the collaborative and ensure that Black mothers and their families are able to access the holistic, whole-person care needed to alleviate maternal health complications and reduce inequities.

“Black Maternal Health Week is an important reminder that to address the alarming reality of the U.S being the only developed nation with maternal mortality rates on the rise, we need to directly tackle racial disparities in all of our solutions,” said Dr. Mary-Ann Etiebet, lead and executive director, Merck for Mothers. “Through Safer Childbirth Cities and the work of the Maternal Health Equity Collaborative, we can begin to address the systemic racism that has left Black women underserved in our current health system.”

"Systemic racism forms the basis upon which current inequities in the perinatal and postpartum health care system are built. This has created various gaps in care that directly impact the health and mortality of the BIPOC community," said Kelenne Blake-Fallon, the Communications Director for the MHEC. "We have big goals for how we can further align our organizations to eliminate maternal mortality and morbidity in Central Texas. Working with the strengths of the collaborative and the broader social services ecosystem, this funding through Safer Childbirth Cities will empower us to help address inequities in maternal health through childcare for Black birthing people in Central Texas, which will have a ripple effect on the community as a whole."

The Pritzker Children’s Initiative is a co-funder of the Austin project. They are part of a larger collective of co-funders of Safer Childbirth Cities including: The Burke Foundation, The Community Health Acceleration Partnership, Fondation CHANEL, George Kaiser Family Foundation, The Nicholson Foundation, Rhia Ventures, The W.K. Kellogg Foundation and Yellow Chair Foundation. To learn more about the initiative, selected organizations, collaborators and co-funders, please visit [SaferChildbirthCities.com](https://www.SaferChildbirthCities.com).



## About Merck

For 130 years, Merck, known as MSD outside of the United States and Canada, has been inventing for life, bringing forward medicines and vaccines for many of the world's most challenging diseases in pursuit of our mission to save and improve lives. We demonstrate our commitment to patients and population health by increasing access to health care through far-reaching policies, programs and partnerships. Today, Merck continues to be at the forefront of research to prevent and treat diseases that threaten people and animals – including cancer, infectious diseases such as HIV and Ebola, and emerging animal diseases – as we aspire to be the premier research-intensive biopharmaceutical company in the world. For more information, visit [www.merck.com](http://www.merck.com) and connect with us on **Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube** and **LinkedIn**.

## About Merck for Mothers

Merck for Mothers is our company's \$500 million initiative to help create a world where no woman has to die giving life. Applying Merck's business and scientific resources for nearly a decade, we collaborate with others to improve the health and well-being of women during pregnancy, childbirth and the postpartum period in support of the Sustainable Development Goals. For more information, visit [www.merckformothers.com](http://www.merckformothers.com).

## Forward-Looking Statement of Merck & Co., Inc., Kenilworth, N.J., USA

This news release of Merck & Co., Inc., Kenilworth, N.J., USA (the "company") includes "forward-looking statements" within the meaning of the safe harbor provisions of the U.S. Private Securities Litigation Reform Act of 1995. These statements are based upon the current beliefs and expectations of the company's management and are subject to significant risks and uncertainties. If underlying assumptions prove inaccurate or risks or uncertainties materialize, actual results may differ materially from those set forth in the forward-looking statements.

Risks and uncertainties include but are not limited to, general industry conditions and competition; general economic factors, including interest rate and currency exchange rate fluctuations; the impact of the global outbreak of novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19); the impact of pharmaceutical industry regulation and health care legislation in the United States and internationally; global trends toward health care cost containment; technological advances, new products and patents attained by competitors; challenges inherent in new product development, including obtaining regulatory approval; the company's ability to accurately predict future market conditions; manufacturing difficulties or delays; financial instability of international economies and sovereign risk; dependence on the effectiveness of the company's patents and other protections for innovative products; and the exposure to litigation, including patent litigation, and/or regulatory actions.

The company undertakes no obligation to publicly update any forward-looking statement, whether as a result of

new information, future events or otherwise. Additional factors that could cause results to differ materially from those described in the forward-looking statements can be found in the company's 2020 Annual Report on Form 10-K and the company's other filings with the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) available at the SEC's Internet site ([www.sec.gov](http://www.sec.gov)).

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