



INDIANA COMMUNITY ACTION POVERTY INSTITUTE

Research and Public Policy

For Immediate Release

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Institute, Indiana Health Fund, Leaders Announce Medical Debt Relief Study

Indianapolis, IN - The Indiana Community Action Poverty Institute is pleased to announce that it will collaborate with Indiana Health Fund, Dr. Jacqueline Wiltshire of IU Fairbanks School of Public Health, and Deborah Fisher and Donjarica Walton, Grassroots MCH Leaders, on a project to study the experiences of pregnant and postpartum women in Indiana Health Fund's medical debt relief program.

"No-one should lose their home or go bankrupt because they sought needed medical care. Our [Overlooked and Undercounted](#) report and [Medical Debt in Indiana](#) report show us that families of young children are particularly vulnerable to financial distress and medical debt," said Erin Macey, Director of Indiana Community Action Poverty Institute. "We are pleased to have the opportunity to study medical debt relief and its policy implications."

[Indiana Health Fund](#)'s mission is to prevent medical expenses, including healthcare bills, from causing financial hardship or even medical bankruptcy to individuals and families throughout Indiana. It established a special fund in 2022 to provide medical debt relief for pregnant and parenting women.

"Indiana Health Fund is excited about this partnership," said Colleen Rusnak, Executive Director. "Single mothers and first-time mothers that are just trying to make ends meet do not need the added burden of paying for their delivery that will many times lead to medical bankruptcy. We are eager to learn more about the women we assist and how to better support this population." Dr. Leigh Meltzer, co-founder of Indiana Health Fund

and OB-GYN, added, "I have spent my entire career taking care of pregnant Hoosiers. Costs related to pregnancy and newborn care can be overwhelming. This can affect families' abilities to provide adequate housing, nutrition and other basic needs for their newborns. Our communities need to do more to support pregnant women and their families."

Dr. [Jacqueline Wiltshire](#), a national expert on disparities in access to health care and health care affordability, will support the analysis and publication of findings. "Medical debt is a threat to the well-being of individuals and their families," she said. "It has a negative impact on financial and economic stability, mental and physical health, as well as access to and use of medical care. It contributes to racial/ethnic disparities in health and health care. Medical debt incurred from pregnancy, childbirth, and post-partum care can have significant and long-lasting consequences for women and their children."

Deborah Fisher, who has [shared her own experience of bankruptcy and loss due to medical debt](#), and Donjarica Walton from [Grassroots MCH Initiative](#) will also support data collection, analysis, and presentation of the findings.

The Indiana Clinical and Translational Sciences Institute provided funding for the project [through its Trailblazer Award program](#).

Pictured Below: Deborah Fisher, Donjarica Walton, and Erin Macey meet to develop the interview guide for the study.



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