



# Home Birth: Resources for Payers and Policymakers

## *Home Birth in the Context of Current Challenges facing the US Maternity Care System...*



While home birth has received considerable media spotlight this year as a result of high-profile documentary films, books and Internet blogs, we do not know if there is or will continue to be a rise in the number of home births as a result of this attention to the delivery of maternity care services.

Even if the number of home births doubles, it would still represent barely more than 1% of all births. In 2005, the National Center for Health Statistics reports that more than 4,138,349 babies were born in the US. Of these, only 37,402 (0.9%) occurred outside of the hospital and only 24,468 (0.59%) were home births.<sup>1</sup>

### **Maternity Care Priorities**

Consider instead the following significant trends that are affecting literally millions of American families this year:

- ❖ The US maternal mortality rate is rising for the first time in decades.
- ❖ The US ranks 27th among developed countries in terms of infant mortality rates, according to Save the Children's "Mother's Index"—behind such nations as Slovenia, Estonia, Portugal, and Hungary. According to the Index, "infant and child mortality rates in the United States are higher than in any other industrialized country, the only exceptions being Latvia, Lithuania and Slovakia."<sup>2</sup>
- ❖ In 2006, the US recorded its highest cesarean section rate at 31.1% of all births, far higher than the 10-15% rate recommended by the World Health Organization.<sup>3,4</sup> Naturally, these occur in hospitals. C-sections are sometimes a lifesaving procedure for mothers and infants, but this climbing rate suggests that far more are being done without evidence-based rationale. While some claim that consumer demand for cesareans is the primary driver behind this, research has not supported this assertion.<sup>5</sup> Research is beginning to reveal that this rising cesarean rate is increasing the incidence of stillbirth in subsequent pregnancies, infertility, stroke and other long-term complications. Not only have primary cesareans increased, but the old adage "once a cesarean, always a cesarean" that we said goodbye to in the 1980s has returned.
- ❖ There are significant racial and ethnic disparities in access to appropriate health care for pregnant women.
- ❖ The incidence of nosocomial infections is rising including methicillin-resistant *staphylococcus aureus* and other hospital-related causes of morbidity.
- ❖ The US has no national plan to address the declining obstetrical workforce and the fact that greater numbers of obstetricians and midwives will be needed in the near future.

These trends—appropriately highlighted by the media, films and others—suggest that maternity care in this country is in crisis, or very nearly so.

- ❖ *ACNM invites payers and policymakers to work with us to address these troubling trends in maternity care.*

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<sup>1</sup> Martin JA, Hamilton BE, Sutton PD, Ventura SJ, Menacker F, Kirmeyer S, Munson ML. Births: Final data for 2005. National vital statistics reports; vol 56 no 6. Hyattsville, MD: National Center for Health Statistics. 2007. Available at [http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nvsr/nvsr56/nvsr56\\_06.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nvsr/nvsr56/nvsr56_06.pdf) . Accessed 08/01, 2008.

<sup>2</sup> UNICEF. State of the World's Children 2008. pp.114-117. Available at: [http://www.unicef.org/publications/index\\_42623.html](http://www.unicef.org/publications/index_42623.html). Accessed 08/01, 2008.

<sup>3</sup> Hamilton BE, Martin JA, Ventura SJ. Births: Preliminary data for 2006. National vital statistics reports; vol 56 no 7. Hyattsville, MD: National Center for Health Statistics. 2007. Available at [http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nvsr/nvsr56/nvsr56\\_07.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nvsr/nvsr56/nvsr56_07.pdf). Accessed 08/01, 2008.

<sup>4</sup> U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Maternal, infant and child health. *Healthy People 2010*, Objectives 16-9. Reduce cesarean births among low-risk (full term, singleton, vertex presentation) women. Available at <http://www.healthypeople.gov/document/html/objectives/16-09.htm> . Accessed 08/01, 2008.

<sup>5</sup> Childbirth Connection, Listening to Mothers II Survey (2006). Press release available at [http://www.childbirthconnection.org/pdf.asp?PDFDownload=LTMII\\_pressrelease](http://www.childbirthconnection.org/pdf.asp?PDFDownload=LTMII_pressrelease) . Accessed 08/01, 2008.