

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: June 12, 2008

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Trust for America's Health Releases Report on Connection between Women's Health and Stalled Infant Mortality Rates

Deteriorating Health among Women is Leading Factor, Low-Income and Minority Babies Most At-Risk

WASHINGTON, DC –Trust for America's Health (TFAH) released a report today, *Healthy Women, Healthy Babies*, in conjunction with the release of the Annie E. Casey Foundation's *KIDS COUNT DATABOOK 2008*. The report explains why after 40 years of progress, infant mortality rates in the U.S. have stalled since 2000. TFAH finds that the deteriorating health of American women, due in part to wide-spread chronic disease epidemics like obesity and diabetes, is taking a toll on American infants, resulting in stagnated improvement when it comes to infant health. TFAH's report offers recommendations for Congress and the American health system to aggressively improve the health of new-born infants.

"In the wake of all the great medical breakthroughs over the last 40 years, one would assume that infant mortality rates would plummet. Instead, medical progress has been cancelled out in the delivery room by the deteriorating health of childbearing-aged women and their lack of health care access; and infant mortality rates have stalled as a result," **said Jeff Levi, Executive Director of Trust for America's Health.** "American women, children and families simply deserve better."

Levi added, "We know now that an infant's chances of sickness, disability and survival often hinge on the health of the mother, *before* she even becomes pregnant. Therefore, the way to reduce risks to new born babies is to invest in a woman's health throughout her childbearing years. If we concentrate our efforts most on those hit hardest by the biggest health problems - low-income and minority women - we will once again see healthier babies and dropping infant mortality rates."

"Two of the most disturbing trends in our 2008 *KIDS COUNT Data Book* that we are releasing today are the increase in the rate of low-birthweight babies and the lack of progress in infant mortality," **said Laura Beavers, coordinator of the national KIDS COUNT project at the Annie E. Casey Foundation.** "The Trust for America's Health's report, *Healthy Women, Healthy Babies* provides us with the information we need to turn this around and to begin to once again see steady progress on both of these critical indicators."

Healthy Women, Healthy Babies reports that approximately 30 percent of women who give birth have some form of pregnancy complication, which cost the U.S. at least \$26.2 billion in 2005. Prematurity and low birth weights are often associated with health issues

in the mother, such as diabetes, high blood pressure, or obesity. Many experts now believe that because the early weeks after conception are critical to a baby's development, traditional prenatal care, which usually begins in the first three months of a pregnancy, comes too late to prevent many serious maternal and child health problems. The way to ensure infant mortality rates resume their fall is to assure that all women are insured and have access to primary care. If we improve the health of all women aged 15-44 and execute earlier interventions for those with chronic health conditions and risks, we will also see better birth outcomes.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS OF *Healthy Women, Healthy Babies*, which were drawn from interviews and comments from 10 leading experts in maternal and child health, include:

- **Fully Implement and Enhance Medicaid Policies.**
 - Assuring better health coverage for poor women through state expansion of Medicaid coverage. States should have the authority to cover women without a federal waiver and allow Medicaid benefits to follow women after the birth for 24 months. Both changes would significantly reduce infant mortality.

- **Expand Other Programs that Provide Primary Care and Other Services to Women of Childbearing Age.**
 - Federal programs like the Healthy Start Infant Mortality Reduction Program, Community Health Centers, Title X Family Planning and Title V Maternal and Child Health Block Grant need better funding to reach all those at risk.

- **Make Research on Preconception Health and Health Care a Priority.**
 - Research needs to be jump-started through increased funding at organizations like the Centers for Disease Control's National Center on Birth Defects and Developmental Disabilities, the National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, and the Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development.

Healthy Women, Healthy Babies was supported by a grant from the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

Trust for America's Health is a non-profit, non-partisan organization dedicated to saving lives by protecting the health of every community and working to make disease prevention a national priority.
www.healthymamericans.org

The Annie E. Casey Foundation is a private charitable organization, whose primary mission is to foster public policies, human-resource reforms, and community supports that more effectively meet the needs of today's vulnerable children and families. For more information, visit www.aecf.org.

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