

9. POLICY POSITION

SUPPORT OF THE SOUTHERN REGIONAL PROJECT ON INFANT MORTALITY

BACKGROUND

Like unemployment rates and crime rates, infant mortality is an indicator of the well-being of our Nation. In 1992, more than 34,400 babies in the United States died before their first birthdays. When compared to other developed countries such as Japan and Germany, the U.S. fares poorly. Moreover, infants in the southern states suffer disproportionately: sixteen of the seventeen states represented by the Southern Governors' Association (SGA) and the Southern Legislative Conference (SLC) have infant mortality rates that are worse than the national average.

In light of these statistics, southern policy makers recognized and have worked aggressively to seek solutions to improve the rate of death among infants in their states; consequently, they have worked to develop model legislation and programs to improve access and financing of health care for parenting women and their babies. Since 1984, the Southern Regional Project on Infant Mortality (Project) has supported the work of governors, legislators and health officials in their effort to reduce infant mortality. Throughout its ten year history, the Project has furthered its mission by collecting and disseminating data, organizing regional conferences, and briefing state policy makers on model maternal and child health legislation and programs.

More than at any time in our Nation's history, governors and state legislators are actively working to reform the delivery of health care in their states. Their concerns are not only how to finance state health systems, but how to maximize limited resources in order to better serve special populations such as low income pregnant and parenting women and families living in regions where access to basic health services is restricted. The Project continues to play an important role in providing state legislators and governors with the necessary research and technical support to develop policies that improve the status of these women and their families.

The Southern Regional Project on Infant Mortality was created in 1984 as a joint initiative of the Southern Governors' Association (SGA) and the Southern Legislative Conference (SLC), and supports the work of governors, state legislators and their staffs in their efforts to improve maternal and infant health and reduce infant mortality in the South.

RECOMMENDATION

In recognition of the continuing need to address the problem of infant mortality and low birthweight births in the South, the Southern Legislative Conference recommends:

- * the continued support of the Project and directs the Project to continue its mission of supporting governors, state legislators and their staffs in their efforts to improve maternal and child health and reduce infant mortality in the South;

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- * that the Advisory Board of the Southern Regional Project on Infant Mortality continue to advise and guide the work of the Project; and
- * that financial support, for the third year, of \$25,000 be provided to the Project in support of its work, effective immediately for the 1994-1995 fiscal year.

Adopted by the Southern Legislative Conference, July 19, 1994, Norfolk, Virginia.