

# INTRODUCTION & ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In June 2015, the Center for Reproductive Rights (the Center) partnered with SisterSong Women of Color Reproductive Justice Collective to host Black Mamas Matter, a cross-sectoral convening of leaders on Black maternal health. Researchers, service providers, policy experts, and community organizers gathered at the SisterSong Mother House in Atlanta, Georgia, to identify innovative strategies for improving Black maternal health outcomes. Among the many ideas generated on that day, participants identified a need for advocacy tools that would move the conversation one step closer to a rights-based maternal health policy agenda.

This toolkit is a direct response to that call. The Center has worked closely with convening participants and other experts to develop materials that will support the work of state maternal health advocates as they mobilize their communities and communicate with state policy leaders. The resources contained here take a human rights based approach to maternal health, emphasizing the *rights of pregnant and birthing women* and calling out *government responsibilities to ensure safe and respectful maternal health care* for all. Because Black women in Southern states face some of the highest risks for poor maternal health outcomes and care, their experiences are centered throughout this publication. At the same time, the Center recognizes that poor maternal health outcomes affect many other groups of women, and that maternal health rights go well beyond the issues of maternal death and illness. Moving forward, the Center will continue to develop advocacy materials from a human rights based frame that expand the scope of this conversation.

The materials included here attempt to distill outcomes from the Black Mamas Matter conversations (on race, reproduction, parenting, and rights) into concrete steps to improve the maternal health of Black women in the South. Through a series of separate but related briefs, this toolkit presents a collection of resources that advocates can use and adapt to their own needs. It begins by explaining the human rights framework as it applies to maternal health, and then examines the data and research on maternal health in the United States, with a special focus on racial disparities. To help bring that data to life, the toolkit includes personal stories about sexual, reproductive, and maternal health from Black women living in the South.

Moving from an assessment of maternal health challenges to an exploration of potential solutions, the toolkit contains an overview of policy recommendations proposed by various stakeholders. This snapshot of the policy landscape is not intended as a one-size-fits-all prescription for action, but rather a menu of options for advocates to explore and adapt to their local priorities. The policy brief is followed by a list of resources that advocates can consult for more information, a set of talking

points on maternal health, and a set of suggestions for building connections and dialogue with other stakeholders engaged in Black maternal health across the country.

The Center wishes to thank the participants of the Black Mamas Matter convening in June 2015 for their vision, leadership, and dedication to improving maternal health in the United States. This toolkit would not have been realized without the participants' generosity in sharing their extensive knowledge and expertise.

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## **Toolkit Contents**

- I. Advancing Maternal Health as a Human Rights Issue
- II. Research Overview of Maternal Mortality and Morbidity in the United States
- III. A State Policy Framework for the Right to Safe and Respectful Maternal Health Care
- IV. Talking Points for Advocates
- V. Resources on Maternal Health in the United States
- VI. Stay Connected