

CASE STUDY
for Health Plans and Payers

How Optima Health hosted baby showers to improve prenatal and postpartum care

Engaging expecting mothers with Medicaid in a fun and educational way

Published – July 2021 • 10-min read



Table of contents

Overview pg. 3

Approach pg. 4

Step 1: Invite members immediately with a congratulatory message. pg. 5

Step 2: Familiarize members to support staff and resources pg. 7

Step 3: Design baby shower agenda to balance education with fun. . pg. 8

Results pg. 9

Related content pg. 10

Overview

The challenge

In the United States, low-income women of color disproportionately suffer from adverse birth outcomes, with Black women enduring the highest rates of infant mortality among any other demographic. Low-income women are more likely to not have access to adequate prenatal and postpartum care compared to women of higher income or on commercial insurance. Delaying or avoiding prenatal care increases the likelihood of adverse birth outcomes, many of which are preventable. Health plans have struggled to address these health disparities and effectively engage their pregnant members, particularly in the Medicaid population.

The organization

Optima Health is a part of Sentara Healthcare's integrated delivery network based in Virginia Beach, VA. Optima Health serves 590,000 members across multiple lines of businesses. As of May 2021, Optima Health's two Medicaid plans served over 315,000 members across the state of Virginia.

The approach

Optima Health observed high infant mortality and low birthweight rates in a few regions they serviced. They found that these outcomes were associated with low prenatal care utilization among their Medicaid membership. To close this gap in care and drive overall reproductive health care use, Optima Health hosts quarterly baby showers at various Sentara Healthcare hospitals across Virginia. The health plan uses the showers to inform pregnant women of the importance of focusing on their health and getting adequate care during and after their pregnancy. The expecting mothers are educated about their benefits and available resources in a fun and welcoming environment.

The result

The baby showers program has not been around for long, but Optima Health has hosted nearly 15 showers and engaged more than 120 members in the last 18 months. Over 50% of attendees were able to close at least one care gap.

Source: Chalhoub T & Rimar K. "The Health Care System and Racial Disparities in Maternal Mortality," Center for American Progress, May 2018; "Sentara Health Plans," Sentara, <https://www.sentara.com/aboutus/about-sentara/sentara-health-plans.aspx>; Optima Health, Virginia Beach, VA; Advisory Board interviews and analysis.

Approach

How Optima Health engaged pregnant members to close care gaps

Health plans, particularly Medicaid managed care plans, struggle with getting their members engaged and involved in preventive care. Pregnant members are a key demographic to engage since almost 50% of all pregnancy-related services and births are covered by Medicaid.

With infant mortality and low birthweights increasing among their Medicaid population, Optima Health needed to close this care gap. To do this, their pregnant members had to see the value of receiving reproductive health care like regular prenatal and postpartum visits. Moreover, members need to trust their health plan and providers for them to feel comfortable utilizing care. Optima Health decided to take an innovative approach: host free baby showers with pregnancy-related education.

The three main steps

Optima Health used these three steps to successfully host baby showers that are both valuable to members and encourage members to close care gaps:

01

Invite members immediately with a congratulatory message

02

Familiarize members to support staff and resources

03

Design baby shower agenda to balance education with fun

Source: Medicaid and CHIP Payment and Access Commission (MACPAC), "Medicaid's Role in Financing Maternity Care," January 2020; Optima Health, Virginia Beach, VA; Advisory Board interviews and analysis.

01 Invite members immediately with a congratulatory message

Many Medicaid members come from disenfranchised communities or are of low socioeconomic status. They may not have the opportunity to have their own baby shower due to financial constraints as they can be costly. However, baby showers are a societal norm where new parents are showered with gifts and emotional support. Optima Health wanted to make sure their pregnant members had a chance to feel celebrated. They identify pregnant members to invite to these baby showers through not only claims data but also state data and survey responses.

State data

Optima Health, like most Medicaid managed care organizations, receives monthly files from their state's health department which includes newly eligible and fully enrolled beneficiaries, who qualify for Medicaid because they became pregnant. As soon as the health plan receives contact information for these individuals, they immediately outreach. This outreach is completed via Optima Health's welcome materials, which includes onboarding and benefits information. Additionally, the new members will receive a call from the health plan reiterating their benefits plus eligible services/programs like the baby showers hosted all around Virginia.

Source: Optima Health, Virginia Beach, VA;
Advisory Board interviews and analysis.

DESIGN BABY SHOWER AGENDA TO BALANCE EDUCATION WITH FUN

Survey responses

At the start of each plan year, Optima Health has their Medicaid members complete a questionnaire which screens for many things, one being if the member or someone in the household is pregnant. Using these data, the health plan will directly outreach to its pregnant members via phone by congratulating them and encouraging them to not delay care by offering an incentive for going to a prenatal and/or postpartum appointment. Optima Health staff will also use this opportunity to promote the baby shower and entice members to attend by sharing that they will have the chance to win prizes like a stroller and diapers.

Note: These showers were originally hosted in-person. However, Optima Health quickly pivoted to a virtual format due to the pandemic. They plan to transition the showers to a hybrid format once the public health emergency (PHE) ends.



Members thank us in tears saying that they would not have had a baby shower otherwise.

Traci Massie, Director of Government Programs
Optima Health

02 Familiarize members to support staff and resources

Optima Health has a staff member dedicated to organizing their baby showers. This employee is also responsible for maintaining relationships with hospitals and community-based organizations (CBOs).

Collaborating with hospitals

Optima Health will collaborate with a Sentara Healthcare hospital in each community for a designated space to host the event. They'll additionally request a couple hospital providers (physicians, nurses, etc.) to participate in the shower. This is important because one goal of these baby showers is to make members comfortable with the health care providers and facilities for when they give birth. In communities where there are no easily accessible Sentara Healthcare facilities, Optima Health will team up with an out-of-network hospital or host the event at a community center. Even when the baby showers are virtual, Optima Health involves providers in the event as shown on the right.

Connecting members to CBOs

Many of Optima Health's pregnant, low-income Medicaid members need social support services. Optima Health invites CBOs to present at the showers to remind members to utilize the free resources. No one community has the same social needs, which is why each shower is planned to reflect the needs of individual regions. In areas with food insecurities, Optima Health will request SNAP¹ or WIC² to speak on the importance of healthy eating and provide breastfeeding tips. The health plan will also invite leaders from local faith-based organizations to create a sense of community and support.

Figure: Physicians presenting during virtual baby shower



“Members come from all ethnicities and cultures, so engaging community and spiritual leaders helps us.

They’re more inclined to take action if a spiritual leader tells them to get prenatal care.”

Traci Massie

Director of Government Programs
Optima Health

1. Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program.
2. Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC).

03 Design baby shower agenda to balance education with fun

Why a welcoming environment is crucial for Medicaid members

Many Medicaid members come from impoverished communities or lack economic and social stability. They may not have the opportunity to have their own baby shower due to financial limitations or lack of social support. Studies have shown having social support during pregnancy positively affects the mother's emotional well-being and lessens her chance of postpartum depression. Pregnant women with little or no social support are also more likely to delay or avoid prenatal care.

Have fun while learning

Optima Health's main goal was to design an event that was informational and engaged members. However, they realized just instructing members how to prepare for the big day and sharing available community resources was not going to drive behavior change. They needed to make the event captivating, so members are more attentive to the information. The health plan also wanted members to feel celebrated and supported. To do this, Optima Health incorporates traditional baby shower games, activities and food. They give members the space and time to get acquainted with and bond with other moms. Members are also allowed to bring their care givers. In the past, members have brought their significant other, spouse, a relative and even other children. Like a traditional shower, attendees play game and can win prizes like a stroller.

Mock-up of Optima Health's Baby Shower agenda

Virtual Baby Shower for Optima Health members

Quarterly 12:00-1:30pm

12:00– 12:20	Introductions and games
12:20– 12:40	WIC program ¹ guest speaker
12:40– 1:00	Tips for motherhood
1:00– 1:20	Virtual tour of Labor and Delivery unit
1:20– 1:30	Wrap-up and draw raffle

Source: Aytac SH & Yazici S, "The Effect of Social Support on Pregnancy and Postpartum Depression," *International Journal of Caring Sciences*, January 2020; Sidebottom AC et al, "Prenatal care: associations with prenatal depressive symptoms and social support in low-income urban women," *Archives of Women's Mental Health* 20, 633–644, June 2017, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00737-017-0730-0>; Optima Health, Virginia Beach, VA; Advisory Board interviews and analysis.

DESIGN BABY SHOWER AGENDA TO BALANCE EDUCATION WITH FUN

As previously mentioned, health care providers from the hosting hospital walk expecting mothers and guests through the birthing process. Members go on a tour of the labor and delivery unit. These two parts of are always apart of every shower agenda as it helps to alleviate members' fears and get them comfortable with their physician and the hospital. Nontraditional practitioners, like midwives and doulas, are also invited inform members of alternative birth options.

Other agenda items may include discussions on:

- Importance of getting prenatal early
- Returning for postpartum care
- Breast feeding tips
- Safe sleep
- Pediatric CPR¹

For in-person showers, Optima Health staff on-site assist members with scheduling prenatal and/or postpartum appointments.

The day wraps-up with attendees getting party favors which may include diapers and baby books (to encourage early reading).

Figure: Screenshot of hospital room from virtual tour



Figure: Expecting mother and guest taking a photo at photobooth



1. Cardiopulmonary resuscitation.

Source: Optima Health, Virginia Beach, VA; Advisory Board interviews and analysis.

Results

Although the baby showers program is only in its second year, Optima Health has already seen promising results. Pre-pandemic, they hosted close to 50 members at just one single baby shower. Event participation varied in the second half of 2020 because of Covid-19. They did see a decline in participation in the first few months of the PHE. However, for the first half of 2021, it slowly picked-up to about 20 – 25 attendees per baby shower. Optima Health foresees attendance increasing as the events become more known and advertised throughout the membership.

Optima Health improved their quality measures and closed care gaps related to reproductive preventative care. They were also able to foster better relationships with all stakeholders.

Furthermore, the health plan improved trust within their Medicaid population and encouraged healthy life-long behaviors by engaging members at the beginning of the baby's lifespan. Optima Health plans to deploy this same strategy in other member programs.

50-75%

Of shower attendees will have at least one prenatal care visit

31%

Of shower attendees receive postpartum care

Source: Optima Health, Virginia Beach, VA; Advisory Board interviews and analysis.

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