

UAMS News Bureau

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**UAMS Study to Address Maternal,
Infant Deaths with \$2.4 Million Federal Grant**

LITTLE ROCK — The University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences (UAMS) will receive up to \$2.4 million over the next four years to test prevention strategies for reducing high rates of maternal and infant deaths in the Arkansas Delta.

The grant from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) will fund a combination of education, training, outreach and preventive health services focusing on Helena-West Helena, Lake Village and Pine Bluff. The initial \$599,887 grant is for one year and must be renewed each year.

The collaborative effort led by BioVentures LLC at UAMS includes key partnerships with the UAMS Institute for Digital Health & Innovation and the UAMS Division for Academic Pathways and Workforce Partnerships.

“This is a big team effort, and the HHS grant will help us address one of the most significant, preventable health issues in our state,” said UAMS’ Stefanie Kennon-McGill, Ph.D., the grant’s principal investigator and project director, as well as senior program manager for BioVentures, which is the project’s operations manager.

Kennon-McGill noted that while BioVentures primarily helps UAMS researchers commercialize their discoveries, its role has expanded in recent years to find other innovative ways to improve the health of Arkansans.

As of March, Arkansas had the highest maternal mortality rate in the United States, at 8.6 deaths per 100,000 live births, compared to the national average of 5.4. Arkansas also has the third highest infant mortality rate in the United States, with 7.67 infant deaths per 1,000 live births, based on 2022 data.

“Our goal with this grant is to test innovative, sustainable strategies to prevent maternal and infant deaths in the Delta region, where Black women are 1.8 times more likely to have pregnancy-related deaths than white, non-Hispanic women,” Kennon-McGill said.

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Called the Delta Maternal Outreach and Transformational Health Education Resource (Delta MOTHER) project, it will establish and track community-level health initiatives. The primary activities supported by the grant will include:

- Holding health screenings and conducting educational outreach at existing community events in Helena-West Helena, Lake Village and Pine Bluff.
- Providing four interactive educational presentations for local health care providers each year covering evidence-based, best practices in maternal and infant care.
- Engaging five students per year at historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) who will identify community needs and work with the BioVentures team to develop their ideas for sustainable solutions and gain entrepreneurial skills and training.

The UAMS Institute for Digital Health & Innovation and its High-Risk Pregnancy Program will offer the Delta MOTHER project clinical expertise, partnership connectivity and fiscal management. Its contributions also include access to its three grant-funded satellite digital health resource centers at Lake Village, Helena-West Helena and Pine Bluff. The institute's mission includes seeking to eliminate health care disparities in Arkansas and beyond through digital health and health care innovations.

The Division for Academic Pathways and Workforce Partnerships will engage HBCU students through its Serving Underrepresented Populations through Engagement and Research (SUPER) Program. The SUPER Program provides opportunities for undergraduates to conduct community-based research, focusing on health disparities that affect medically underserved populations. It is a component of the HBCU Med Track Program.

Other key partners on the grant are the Jefferson Regional Medical Center School of Nursing in Pine Bluff, the Arkansas Rural Health Partnership in Lake Village, and UAMS East Regional Campus in Helena-West Helena.

UAMS is the state's only health sciences university, with colleges of Medicine, Nursing, Pharmacy, Health Professions and Public Health; a graduate school; a hospital; a main campus in Little Rock; a Northwest Arkansas regional campus in Fayetteville; a statewide network of regional campuses; and eight institutes: the Winthrop P. Rockefeller Cancer Institute, Jackson T. Stephens Spine & Neurosciences Institute, Harvey & Bernice Jones Eye Institute, Psychiatric Research Institute, Donald W. Reynolds Institute on Aging, Translational Research Institute, Institute for Digital Health & Innovation and the Institute for Community Health Innovation. UAMS includes UAMS Health, a statewide health system that encompasses all of UAMS' clinical enterprise. UAMS is the only adult Level 1 trauma center in the state. UAMS has 3,275 students, 890 medical residents and fellows, and five dental residents. It is the state's largest public employer with more than 12,000 employees, including 1,200 physicians who provide care to patients at UAMS, its regional campuses, Arkansas Children's, the VA Medical Center and Baptist Health. Visit www.uams.edu or www.uamshealth.com. Find us on [Facebook](#), [X](#) (formerly Twitter), [YouTube](#) or [Instagram](#).