

# Improving Equitable Access to Evidence-based Treatment for Pregnant and Postpartum People with Opioid Use Disorder

## Statement of Problem

Opioid use in pregnancy and the postpartum period has escalated dramatically in recent years, in parallel with the epidemic observed in the general population. Opioid use disorder (OUD) in pregnancy and the postpartum period are linked to adverse health effects for both mothers and infants. The maternal mortality reviews in Philadelphia and Pennsylvania have both identified substance use as a major risk factor for pregnancy-associated deaths.

Moreover, there are longstanding disparities in maternal substance use by demographic and socioeconomic factors. A [previous PolicyLab study](#) found that among a large sample of adolescent and young adult mothers with a history of child welfare involvement, 1 in 3 individuals were diagnosed with substance use in the postpartum period.

The study team's [prior work](#) also showed that treatment continuity in the postpartum period was very low for mental health conditions, leaving mothers at risk to experience poor health and maladaptive parenting approaches. Medication-assisted treatment (MAT) is the recommended treatment approach for OUD during pregnancy. However, MAT is not accessible and is, therefore, underutilized among pregnant and postpartum populations.

In the [Pennsylvania 2020 Family Support Needs Assessment](#) conducted by the PolicyLab team, we identified an absence of and/or unmet need for specialized programs offering MAT to pregnant and postpartum persons in counties with disproportionate need for services. Moreover, recent research has identified significant racial/ethnic disparities in receipt of MAT among pregnant people. Remedying the profound disparities in OUD treatment access and outcomes among pregnant and postpartum populations requires an in-depth understanding of structural and social determinants of health that are unique to this population.

## Description

With support from March of Dimes, PolicyLab is conducting a mixed-method study to improve equitable access to evidence-based treatment for pregnant and postpartum people with OUD. Our study's three aims were informed by the World Health Organization's [Conceptual Framework for Action on Social Determinants of Health](#):

- We will quantitatively describe the receipt of MAT among eligible pregnant and postpartum people across sociodemographic factors, both in a national cohort of privately insured people and a Pennsylvania statewide cohort of Medicaid-covered women.
- To contextualize and expand upon our quantitative work, we will also engage key community stakeholders—including patients, health care providers, and administrators or leadership at treatment facilities—to characterize the structural and social determinants of MAT receipt for pregnant and

postpartum people with OUD.

- We will better understand the policy landscape and best practices for MAT access and quality for pregnant and postpartum people, with a focus on improving equity in receipt of care, through a national policy scan and interviews with key informants in Pennsylvania. This policy scan will inform policy and program recommendations for supporting access to MAT and family-centered treatment programs in pregnancy and the postpartum period for people with OUD.

## Next Steps

We will utilize two administrative data sources to identify pregnant and postpartum people with diagnosed OUD and examine patients' sociodemographic and geographical factors associated with MAT receipt. In the parallel qualitative work, we will enroll community members and conduct individual, semi-structured, in-depth interviews to understand barriers and facilitators in accessing and providing MAT for pregnant and postpartum people. Our multidisciplinary team of quantitative and qualitative researchers and policy analysts will develop three distinct interview guides to appropriately engage stakeholders in articulating the patient-, provider- and facility-level experiences.

The findings from this project have significant potential to identify opportunities and best practices for evidence-based treatment engagement for opioid-dependent pregnant and postpartum people with particular focus on geographic and racial inequities.

*This project page was last updated in September 2022.*

## Suggested Citation

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## PolicyLab Leads

### **Meredith Matone** **DrPH, MHS**

#### **Director**

Dr. Matone's research interests include maternal and young child health, as well as family well-being. She focuses on building community and public agency research partnerships to support improvements in policies and programs that serve mothers and infants in under-resourced communities. She is experienced in large-scale program evaluation, mixed-methods research designs, and use of administrative data for observational study designs in areas of child and caregiver health.

Dr. Matone is a senior fellow at the University of Pennsylvania's Leonard Davis Institute of Health Economics, a faculty affiliate at The Field Center, and a board member of the Pennsylvania Association for the Education of Youth Children. Dr. Matone received her Doctor of Public Health, specializing in child and adolescent health and development, from Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health. She is an alumnus of the Doris Duke Fellowship for the Promotion of Child Well-being program and a former Stoneleigh Foundation fellow.



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## Team

### **Doug Strane** **MPH**

#### **Research Scientist**

Doug Strane (he/him) is a research scientist at PolicyLab at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia (CHOP). Mr. Strane is experienced in mixed methods program evaluation and analysis of administrative data for observational study designs related to child and family health. His research interests include the ways in which health systems can address social determinants of health; the changing health insurance landscape for families; and the intersection of parenting and substance use disorder. He also serves as the senior evaluation manager at CHOP's Center for Health Equity.

Mr. Strane received his Master of Public Health in Epidemiology from University of Michigan School of Public Health. He is a former Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Public Health Associate Program fellow.



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### **Katherine Kellom**

## **Administrative Manager**

Katherine Kellom (she/they) is an administrative manager at PolicyLab and the director of the Qualitative Research Core at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia. She has worked at nationally top-ranked institutions with teams comprised of experts in their fields conducting qualitative, mixed and multi-method research for more than ten years. Beginning as a research assistant at the University of Pennsylvania's Mixed Methods Research Lab, Katherine currently serves across a variety of project teams to provide conceptual and technical support for clinical and community-based research projects. She has extensive knowledge and valuable practical experience applying qualitative research methodologies with a focus on integrating key stakeholder perspectives and goals into research designs.

Katherine leads and advises project teams using qualitative methods to achieve research aims on projects ranging from small pilots to state-wide, mixed-methods evaluations. Katherine is an expert in facilitation techniques and in the use of the qualitative data analysis tool, NVivo; she provides training in both areas. As director of the Qualitative Research Core, Katherine manages and supports staff members and qualitative team members in the Core and at PolicyLab, ensuring skillset development and access to the resources needed to contribute high-quality work to various project teams.

Katherine received her Bachelor of Arts degree from Bryn Mawr College in 2009, majoring in psychology.



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## **Jennifer Whittaker PhD, MUP**

### **Research Scientist**

Jennifer Whittaker (she/her) is a research scientist at PolicyLab and the senior manager of qualitative methods training and program development with the Qualitative Research Core at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia (CHOP).

Dr. Whittaker has over a decade of experience conducting qualitative and mixed-method research, with a particular focus on community-engaged research. As a member of the Qualitative Research Core, she develops and leads training in qualitative research methods and provides research design and conceptual support to research teams across CHOP. At PolicyLab, Dr. Whittaker is a member of the maternal health research team where her work focuses on the role of place and public systems in supporting maternal and child health. She serves as the staff lead for the Family and Community Health Portfolio and is an advisory board member for the Community Partnerships in Research program. She is also a member of CHOP's Qualitative Methods Research Affinity Group, a fellow at University at Pennsylvania's Center for Public Health Initiatives and a board member for the Pennsylvania Rural Health Association.

An alumna of Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's Health Policy Research Scholars Leadership Development Program, Dr. Whittaker is trained in interdisciplinary, applied and policy-oriented scholarship. She completed her PhD in city planning at the University of Pennsylvania Weitzman School of Design, where her research led to [Our Rural Pennsylvania](#), an atlas created by mothers and caregivers to record the everyday places that influence their health. She completed her master's degree in urban and regional planning at the University at Buffalo and her bachelor's degree in geography at the State University of New York at Geneseo. Prior to coming to Philadelphia, Dr. Whittaker was a research associate at the Food Systems Planning and Healthy Communities Lab where she conducted research on the role of local government policy and planning in facilitating healthy communities.



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## Funders of Project

March of Dimes

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## Related Tools & Publications

- [Chronic Disease Prevalence and Discontinuation of Medications Among Young Mothers with a Relationship to the Child Welfare System](#)  
[Article](#)  
Feb 2016
- [Health Status of Young Adult Mothers with a History of Child Welfare Involvement](#)  
[Research at a Glance](#)  
Jan 2017
- [Mental Health of Mothers of Infants with Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome and Prenatal Opioid Exposure](#)  
[Article](#)  
Feb 2018

- [The Role of Child Care in Family-centered Approaches to Treatment for Substance Use Disorder  
Issue Briefs](#)

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