



STATE OF TENNESSEE

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NEWS RELEASE

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REPORT CALLS FOR INCREASED FOCUS ON MATERNAL AND INFANT HEALTH

**NASHVILLE, Tenn.** — Nine of every 1000 babies born alive in Tennessee in 2004 died before their first birthday—a rate surpassed only by Louisiana and Mississippi. In addition, babies born too early or too small incur high, long-term health and social costs for Tennessee, according to a new report from the Comptroller’s Office of Research.

“Mothers and Babies: The Health of Tennessee’s Future” indicates that medical expenses associated with low weight births in Tennessee totaled an estimated \$160 million in 2002. Learning disabilities and developmental delays associated with premature and low weight births increase demand for special education and decrease a child’s chances of graduating from high school.

Tennessee appears to lack human, financial and structural health care resources for mothers and babies. Poor maternal health affects infant health, yet 15 rural counties lack obstetric providers. In addition, according to “Mothers and Babies,” the Department of Health has allocated few of its Maternal and Child Health resources to women of childbearing age, and the Office of Women’s Health has not been sufficiently funded or staffed since its inception in 2000.

The report recommends various state and local entities cooperate to develop strategies to improve health care availability in rural areas and to increase prenatal care for low-income residents in underserved areas. The report states that the Department of Health should make it a state a priority to reduce of infant mortality and low birth weight rates, increase funding for the Office of Women’s Health, reallocate resources to programs and services for women of childbearing age, and enhance relevant data collection to assist decision makers.

The report is available on the Comptroller’s Web site at [www.comptroller.state.tn.us](http://www.comptroller.state.tn.us).

For additional information about this report, please **contact**:

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