

# Human Rights Watch

## Indigenous Peoples' Rights

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/02/08/us-pregnancy-health-bill-package-recognizes-climate-change-threat>

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Environmental Justice Crucial in Ending Maternal Health Crisis

WheelerSkye

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The United States is in a maternal health crisis. It has the worst maternal mortality and morbidity statistics [among wealthy countries](#), and premature birth rates rose for [five years running](#) up to 2019 the latest year for which data is available. This is a broader human rights crisis too; [systemic racism](#) past and present lie at the center of the crisis. Native American and Black women are [two-to-three times](#) as likely to die of pregnancy-related causes than white women, and rates of [infant deaths](#), [low birth weight](#), and [premature births](#) are about twice as bad for Black babies as white babies.

A gigantic 12-bill package of proposed laws to improve maternal health that was introduced during the last session of the US Congress and reintroduced today proposes many reforms and improvements backed by experts and Human Rights Watch partners. These include more funding for community organizations working with pregnant people, perinatal workers from the same communities and backgrounds as their patients, longer government health insurance (Medicare) coverage for pregnant people, and commissioning a comprehensive study on maternal deaths and serious illness among Native Americans.

Importantly, the package includes a bill to start addressing climate crisis-related impacts on maternal health. The detrimental impact of air pollution on pregnancy and infant health is referenced, as is pregnant peoples increased vulnerability to heat stress, something particularly relevant for outdoor workers as our world warms. Research suggests there may be adverse health impacts of heat on pregnant people as a result of increased risk for [gestational diabetes](#), and increased [hospitalizations in extreme heat](#), especially for Black pregnant women compared to white ones.

A new [review of](#) existing research on pregnancy exposure to heat and adverse birth outcomes has again highlighted this link and warns of bigger impacts on low-income women. Earlier this year, another [review](#) of US studies also found a link between adverse birth outcomes and heat exposure, stronger for Black mothers. Pregnancy health is [often left out](#) of heat and health warnings.

Pregnant people in the US need Congress to pass bold legislation to address these problems and consider how the climate crisis might worsen them. This package of bills offers real hope that they will do so.

United States Lack of Regulation Fuels Crisis of Unaffordable Insulin

Ending Preventable Deaths from Cervical Cancer in Rural Georgia

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