



**ICTC**  
**PRESS RELEASE**  
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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**Black Birth Survey raises concerns about health disparities for Black women and infants**

*Portland, OR, November 29, 2011:* The [International Center for Traditional Childbearing](http://www.ictcmidwives.org) (ICTC) is today releasing the results of the first Black Birth Survey completed by the nonprofit organization, which raises concerns about the birth experiences and healthcare of Black women in Oregon and their babies. ICTC is presenting the survey results to a group of healthcare, public services and nonprofit organizations later today at a convening at Legacy Emanuel Medical Center .

Shafia Monroe, president and CEO of ICTC said, “While these findings are preliminary and we need to complete more research on these issues, the survey in many ways verifies what we see and hear from Black women in Oregon’s communities. Many are in the public health care system, they don’t have access to or support to take birthing classes or maintain breastfeeding, they often give birth alone with no support besides hospital staff, and some expressed fear during their time in the hospital based on their treatment. These are issues that need to be exposed, explored and understood by the healthcare, public services and nonprofit sectors so that we can collectively work towards equity in the provision of healthcare services for pregnant and parenting Black women.”

The ICTC surveyed 245 Black women over the last year and received help from Portland State University to complete the numerical analysis. Major issues raised by the survey include:

- Nearly two-thirds of women did not attend birth education classes prior to delivery.
- Nearly one-third of women were concerned about their treatment during the birth of their baby.
- The majority of women surveyed have government-paid health insurance coverage.
- Over half of the women surveyed were single (not married or in a partnership), and thus without the type of support that having a partner provides.
- Only 25% of Black women were still breastfeeding their babies at six months, compared to over 60% for the Oregon population over all, and over 40% as the national average.

Monroe added, “Because our work at ICTC relates to training women to be professional doulas and support women before, during and after birth, we need to have a deeper understanding of

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what's working now in the healthcare and social services sectors and where the breakdowns in services, communications and outreach are occurring for Black women.”

A recent report on inequities by race/ethnicity from the Coalition of Communities of Color based in Portland, Oregon (*Communities of Color in Multnomah County: An Unsettling Profile*, 2010), showed that African American babies have an 11.4% rate for low birth weight (less than 5.5 lbs) in Multnomah County – which encompasses Portland and several other communities – compared to a rate of 5.9% for White babies, 5.6% for Hispanics, and 8.1% overall for all people of color. The same report showed that infant mortality rates (deaths per 1000 live births) were 8.6% for African Americans compared to 4.9% for Whites, 4.9% for Hispanics, and 7.3% overall for all people of color (Statistics source: Multnomah County Health Disparities Project, 2008).

Monroe noted that part of the follow up to the survey will be to continue ICTC's and other organizations' advocacy for House Bill 3311, signed into law this past legislative session, which directs the Oregon Health Authority to investigate how doulas can improve birth outcomes for women with disproportionately poor birth outcomes. The Bill was sponsored by Rep. Tina Kotek, who is a major advocate for underserved Oregonians and the availability of healthcare for all populations.

“We have seen birth outcomes for both the mother and baby improve when Black women have access to affordable doula services. This is the type of community-based, direct healthcare services that can lead to big changes and ultimately equity in how Black women are treated throughout the birth process,” said Monroe.

The presentation later today on the Black Birth Survey is from 5:30-7:00 pm at the Legacy Emanuel Medical Center, Atrium, 2801 N. Gantenbein, Portland.

*The International Center for Traditional Childbearing is an infant mortality prevention, breastfeeding promotion and midwife training non-profit organization. The ICTC mission is to increase the number of midwives, doulas, and healers of color; and to empower families in order to reduce maternal and infant mortality. Established in 1991 and headquartered in Portland, Oregon, ICTC has members and chapters around the globe to improve health outcomes.*

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