



WYWF Community Conversations: Maternal Mental Health, May 6th, 2022 @ 12-1pm

Organizers: Bekah Smith (moderator), Marissa Carpio, & Alex Shannon

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Maternal Mental Health Awareness Week is a campaign in the U.S. hosted by the Blue Dot Project in conjunction with other partners across the nation. We thought this would be a great opportunity to kickstart our WYWF Community Conversations. Our plan is to host pop-up discussions with community members all across Wyoming to provide a place to share experiences and learn from the public and each other. **Subscribe to our [newsletters](#) or become a [Power Advocate](#) to receive notification for the next WYWF Community Conversation.**

The Wyoming Women's Foundation submitted an interim session topic to our Wyoming legislators on Maternal Health. Wyoming legislators meet in the "off season" of the legislative session to research and prepare legislation for the coming year. The Labor, Health, and Social Services Committee chose Maternal Health as their top priority to review this interim session!

For the purpose of these notes, I will be summarizing the conversation without attaching names to any of the responses to respect the privacy of participants in the conversation.

- 1. Do postpartum depression and other perinatal disorders have to occur right after the birth of your baby?**
 - a. No! It varies for everyone, and it does not have to happen with your first child either. Many participants said that it did not happen with their first few children. These disorders can present during pregnancy, and up to a year after. Anecdotally, some mothers would say it could continue 3 years after birth.
- 2. What can someone do if they think their mental health may be impacted due to pregnancy, giving birth, or after giving birth?**
 - a. Acknowledge what is happening and seek help! Talking to your OB-GYN is the first step and being honest is so important. Screening done at pediatricians' offices is great, but sometimes the screening does not encompass all the symptoms of the spectrum of postpartum disorders.
- 3. Let us say I am a loved one of someone who might be going through postpartum depression or other perinatal disorders—how do I support or help someone?**
 - a. Educate yourself and take care of yourself! Postpartum Support International has many resources for loved ones. It is important to note that loved ones are also affected and those people can range from grandparents to co-workers that help babysit. There is a wide range of caretakers who are affected by postpartum depression.
- 4. Did one of your friends or family members do something that really helped you during the perinatal stage?**
 - a. Having a community or support group of close friends and family members is so helpful. Personally, some of the attendees had to get over the shame of what they were feeling to accept help from others. Hearing stories from other mothers really helped. Postpartum

depression and related perinatal disorders are rarely talked about, though they are extremely prevalent! Also, when friends and family offered “actionable help”, like meal prepping, driving someone to the doctor and watching the baby, vacuuming, etc. instead of asking “what do you need?” was very helpful for mothers.

5. What are the resources for caregivers or friends?

- a. Postpartum Support International has a great page all about this!
<https://www.postpartum.net/get-help/family/>.

6. What resources are available in our state (many of you are resource providers, what is available/what do you provide)? What have you used or found to be helpful in the perinatal stage?

- a. Resources mentioned here included Postpartum Support International’s Wyoming chapter and website, Primary Care Providers who are trained and know what to look out for, well-baby checks, posters in pediatricians’ offices, public health nurses in communities for home-visitation services, tight-knit communities, mindfulness, [Psychology Today](#) resources, Charlie Health, [PSI-WY Climb Out of Darkness](#), and the new [Maternal Health hotline](#).

7. How does mental health impact women’s access to economic self-sufficiency?

- a. Many mothers have stifling anxiety to leave their home and their baby. It is extremely difficult to have adequate paid time off from work to reset when you have children. Sometimes you are using all of your PTO and sick days to take care for them. Often, that means making a decision between taking care of yourself and taking care of your kid. Yet we know that productivity and one’s ability to earn a self-sufficient wage is hindered by not addressing maternal mental health. Many people in workplaces are inexperienced with PPD and perinatal disorders; so, it is hard to find common ground and understanding. There is an opportunity for business leaders to become more informed and part of the solution. Overall, much of whether you can integrate back into work is dependent on your situation (if you have a partner or family nearby, dependent on your work schedule or type of work, etc.).

8. What resources are we lacking in Wyoming? Are there areas of the state that have less or more resources?

- a. Some of the obstacles for people struggling with maternal mental health in Wyoming were (1) the stigma of mental health issues and that these issues should be dealt with internally and by yourself (2) partners are often gone all week for travel and work based on type of common work in Wyoming and that the state is so dispersed (3) the isolation in Wyoming, especially in small towns, can be unmatched. Wyoming does not have enough providers, especially in rural areas of the state, to meet the needs appropriately. The waiting list for affordable mental healthcare is weeks to months long in our state, so it can be hard to catch new mothers in the perinatal period with this waiting list.

9. What are the next steps we can take to help build a better support system in WY for those dealing with maternal mental health disorders?

- a. Potentially, a forum or page where WY women can anonymously post, seek help, and share stories without stigma attached may be helpful. More work would have to be done to see if there was a way to minimize triggers. Hospitals could also adapt training for new parents before they exit the hospital; it could function as a checklist of sorts for postpartum issues and include resources. However, more research would have to be done to make it effective without being overwhelming, as those first few days can be very stressful. Telehealth could be a great option in the state to serve those who are in less

dense areas of the state. However, to deal with the long waiting list because of lack of providers, lessening licensing restrictions for Wyoming might allow providers in other states to expand their clientele to Wyomingites. Lastly, public (school, church, business, league sports, etc.) trainings to identify PPD and other disorders could be very helpful. Sometimes a mother with unwashed hair for a week straight is not a “bad mom” but is a struggling mom who might need resources.

Resources

- What does perinatal mean?
 - <https://www.sabp.nhs.uk/our-services/mental-health/perinatal/what-does-perinatal-mean>
- It Takes a Valley is working to get resources for each county in the state available on their website. It Takes a Valley is a local project that offers free and low-cost community-based opportunities for expecting parents and those with young children in the Tetons.
 - <https://www.ittakesavalley-tetons.org/>
- The Maternal-Child Mental Health Program has guides, screening tools, and resources for providers who interact with perinatal mental health care.
 - <https://www.mcmh.uw.edu/resources>
- Additionally, the PSI Perinatal Psychiatric Consult line is a free service for medical professionals who have questions about mental health care for perinatal patients.
 - <https://www.postpartum.net/professionals/perinatal-psychiatric-consult-line/>
- Dr. A. Cummings Rork is a psychiatrist in Wyoming who specializes in Women’s mental health and perinatal and reproductive psychiatry.
 - <https://www.wypsychiatry.com/>
- Cathy Holman (aka Prairie Wife in Heels) is a media influencer who feels passionately about issues affecting women and families in Wyoming. She has a blog where she shares her experiences and connects with others.
 - <https://prairiewifeinheels.com/>
- 2020 Mom is a national maternal mental health non-profit organization aggressively closing gaps in maternal mental health care.
 - <https://www.2020mom.org/>
- Postpartum Support International (WY) is the world’s leading non-profit organization dedicated to helping those suffering from perinatal mood disorders, the most common complication of childbirth.
 - <https://psichapters.com/wy/>
- Mom Club (Laramie area) provides a safe, comfortable, space for women to feel empowered, connect with local service, and provide emotional support and education to moms.
 - <https://www.momclubwyo.org/>
- Wyoming Perinatal Quality Collaborative will focus on implementing quality improvement projects that impact a broad range of issues that affect maternal and perinatal health in both healthcare and public health settings.
 - <https://health.wyo.gov/publichealth/mch/wyoming-perinatal-quality-collaborative/>
- Wyoming Department of Health- Maternal and Child Unit’s mission is to improve the health and well-being of Wyoming families and communities by supporting and collaborating on public health activities that benefit the health of mothers, infants, children, youth, and young adults, including those with special health care needs.
 - <https://health.wyo.gov/publichealth/mch/>