BLOOMFIELD, Conn., 28 November, 2018 - A three-year, $310,000 grant from the Cigna Foundation will enable March of Dimes to expand a new model of group prenatal care – Supportive Pregnancy Care – designed to help improve the health of moms and babies during pregnancy, labor and delivery and infancy.

“Cigna and the Cigna Foundation have a long history of supporting March of Dimes in its mission to help prevent premature births. As we celebrate our 25-year partnership, we’re excited to join hands in a program that will help improve the health, well-being and sense of security for women and their babies,” said Mary Engvall, executive director of the Cigna Foundation.

The announcement follows the release earlier this month of the March of Dimes 2018 Premature Report Card, [https://www.marchofdimes.org/mission/prematurity-reportcard.aspx](https://www.marchofdimes.org/mission/prematurity-reportcard.aspx), which showed that preterm birth rose for the third consecutive year. March of Dimes reports that one in 10 babies in the United States is born prematurely (before 37 weeks of pregnancy), meaning that the U.S. has one of the worst preterm birth rates of any high-income country in the world. Babies who survive an early birth may experience lifelong health issues such as learning disabilities, vision and hearing loss. Even infants born just a few weeks early have a greater risk of respiratory distress syndrome (RDS), feeding difficulties, temperature instability (hypothermia), jaundice and delayed brain development.

“Last year, for the third year in a row, more U.S. babies were born too soon with serious risks to their health,” according to Stacey D. Stewart, president of March of Dimes. “We know that chronic racial and ethnic inequities and unequal access to quality health care are factors in the rising preterm birth rate. Group prenatal care, which is gaining in popularity, is an innovative way to help prevent preterm births among all women, including women of color, who are up to 50 percent more likely to deliver prematurely.”

March of Dimes Supportive Pregnancy Care (SPC) for moms-to-be is prenatal care in a group setting with women of similar gestational ages. At each group session, women learn to perform their own self-care by measuring and recording their own weight and blood pressure with the help of a facilitator. A licensed obstetric provider meets individually with each woman to perform a physical assessment and discuss specific concerns in a semi-private area within the group space. During each SPC visit, women have more time with their health care providers than they would during conventional individual prenatal checkups, and benefit not only from prenatal care education but also from the vital social and emotional support they receive from other mothers. Importantly, women in the program also receive support for other challenges they may face, such as lack of transportation, access to nutritious food or a need for basic necessities.

The SPC environment can empower women to take control of their pregnancy care and fosters relationships that can last throughout their pregnancies and beyond. Research from the National Institutes of Health (NIH) found that a group setting for prenatal care is associated with fewer preterm births, reduced incidence of low-birth-weight infants, and shorter neonatal intensive care stays. ¹

SPC also includes web-based tools and a social media platform to enable mothers to connect and socialize with each other online outside the group sessions and access helpful information on healthy pregnancies. The program is open to any expecting mother interested in participating, regardless of health insurance coverage.
March of Dimes currently is operating SPC pilot sites in Tennessee and Ohio, and, with the help of the Cigna Foundation grant, will open new sites in Denver, Colorado; Los Angeles, California; Phoenix, Arizona and a city to be determined in Massachusetts.

About March of Dimes

March of Dimes leads the fight for the health of all moms and babies. We support research, lead programs and provide education and advocacy so that every family can have the best possible start. Building on a successful 80-year legacy of impact and innovation, we stand up for every mom and every baby. Visit marchofdimes.org or nacersano.org for more information. Visit shareyourstory.org for comfort and support. Find us on Facebook and follow us on Instagram and Twitter.

About the Cigna Foundation

The Cigna Foundation, founded in 1962, is a private foundation funded by contributions from Cigna Corporation (NYSE: CI) and its subsidiaries. The Cigna Foundation supports organizations sharing its commitment to enhancing the health of individuals and families, and the well-being of their communities, with a special focus on those communities where Cigna employees live and work.

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