

## Public-Private Partnership in Puerto Rico Leads to Increased Access to 17P and a Lower Preterm Birth Rate

*Puerto Rico's preterm birth rate dropped after the Puerto Rico Department of Health began working with a private healthcare company to increase access to 17P.*

In 2008, Puerto Rico's preterm birth rate was almost 20 percent—the highest in the nation at the time. Preterm birth increases the risk for infant health problems, long-term developmental issues, and death compared to infants who are born full term. Progesterone supplementation is one of the few interventions that has been found to effectively prevent preterm birth among women with known risk factors. For mothers with a history of preterm birth, a synthetic form of progesterone, 17 Alpha-Hydroxyprogesterone Caproate (17P), has been found to reduce recurrence of preterm birth by 33 percent.

In 2009, the health secretary ensured that all publically financed health plans covered the cost of compounded 17P. The Puerto Rico Department of Health (PRDH) collaborated with the private healthcare company Vita Healthcare to present the island's health secretary with information about the importance of 17P. PRDH and Vita Healthcare provided data comparing the costs of preterm infants being treated in the neonatal intensive care unit to the cost of providing women with weekly 17P injections to prevent prematurity. PRDH argued that 17P would benefit Puerto Rico's women, children, state government budgets, and insurance companies.

### Steps Taken

- Once public health plans were required to pay for the cost of 17P, PRDH and Vita Healthcare began to educate obstetricians about the importance of 17P and its coverage.
- Vita Healthcare representatives also informed the island's obstetricians and nurses that 17P is only indicated for women with a history of prior preterm birth when she is between her sixteenth and twentieth week of pregnancy.
- PRDH, the Puerto Rico chapter of the March of Dimes, and Vita Healthcare convened a series of conferences near physicians' offices so they could learn more about the risks of prematurity, preterm birth statistics, and prevention strategies, including data on the efficacy of 17P in decreasing the prematurity rate. Offering continuing medical education credits helped incentivize physicians' attendance.
- Vita Healthcare personnel visited all practicing obstetricians' offices almost weekly and engaged the obstetric and office personnel in early identification of candidates for 17P. Once a patient is identified, Vita staff enter her information into their system, which sends an alert when she is approaching 16 weeks. During this period, Vita staff send the patient's information to the

- Seventy-five percent of births in Puerto Rico are publically financed.
- Prior to Puerto Rico's 17P Initiative, the preterm birth rate was the highest in the nation at 19.8 percent.
- In five years, the commonwealth's preterm birth rate fell to 14 percent.

insurance company for approval. This process provides a mechanism to ensure 17P is initiated between 16-20 weeks gestation, when studies suggest it is most effective.

- To expedite the approval process, Vita Healthcare provided insurance companies with assurances that it was only going to refer patients who met eligibility criteria for 17P. Patients with a history of preterm birth who are currently pregnant with a single baby are eligible for 17P.
- To help facilitate insurance pre-approval, Vita Healthcare developed a streamlined process to approve women eligible for 17P within 24 hours. Three Vita Healthcare physicians developed a simple, standardized pre-approval form for providers to sign and send to an insurance company case manager for authorization. Vita Healthcare staff work with physicians' offices to review the paperwork and pre-approval form to expedite approval.
- Once eligible women are identified and started on 17P, Vita Healthcare personnel contact them each week to ensure compliance with treatment.
- Vita Healthcare nurses provide women with weekly 17P injections at convenient locations such as work, school, or at home. This eliminates the transportation barrier that many states face when trying to ensure adherence with weekly injections. This administration of 17P is covered by all of Puerto Rico's publically funded health plans.
- Vita Healthcare operates a call center with nurses answering the phone 24 hours a day, seven days a week to provide support to women if they have questions or concerns about their treatment.
- Vita Healthcare presents data to insurance companies on their 17P compliance success rates and estimated cost savings.
- Vita Healthcare and PRDH also educate women about 17P and its purpose and availability through health fairs, Facebook, and magazine and newspaper articles.

## Results

- Between 2008 and 2013, Puerto Rico's preterm birth rate dropped from 19.8 percent to 14 percent based on last menstrual period.
- In 2014, 85 percent of eligible patients received 17P in Puerto Rico.
- Between 2009 and 2015, the women who received 17P treatment through Vita Healthcare gained an average of 6.6 weeks of pregnancy compared to their first pregnancy, averaging 36 weeks gestation.
- The March of Dimes 2015 premature birth [report card](#) indicates that the preterm birth rate in Puerto Rico is 11.8 percent based on obstetric gestational age.
- In 2014, Puerto Rico won the March of Dimes Virginia Apgar award, which was given to states and territories that lowered their preterm birth rate by 8 percent or more between 2009 and 2014.

## Lessons Learned

- Public-private partnerships are extremely valuable in increasing access to 17P. Neither PRDH nor Vita Healthcare could have achieved these results on their own.

# State Story



- Creating personal connections is critical. Vita Healthcare representatives establish personal relationships with case managers at insurance companies and obstetrics nurses in hospitals, which allow for the quick and easy flow of information.
- Working collaboratively with physicians and nurses is important. PRDH has been consistently working with providers for years to inform them of the importance of 17P and early identification of eligible women. PRDH also works through providers to educate women. Incentives, such as refrigerator stickers that list preterm birth warning signs, are provided to physicians' offices to distribute to patients.

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