

**THE MELANIE BLOCKER STOKES MOTHERS ACT:
QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ON THE NEW LAW**
A Document Created by the Office of Senator Robert Menendez

RESEARCH

We still have a lot to learn about why women get postpartum depression and how best to help them with treatment, how does this law help get us that information?

The new law asks the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to coordinate and continue research to expand the understanding of the causes of, and find treatments for, postpartum conditions. The legislation explicitly states that this research could include the following:

- Basic research concerning the etiology and causes of the postpartum depression and psychosis;
- Epidemiological studies to address the frequency and natural history of postpartum depression and psychosis and the differences among racial and ethnic groups with respect to these conditions;
- The development of improved screening and diagnostic techniques;
- Clinical research for the development and evaluation of new treatments.

EDUCATION

Isn't educating women about postpartum depression a key component to ensuring that they get the treatment they need, what does this law do to address that?

The new law pushes for increased information and education programs for health care professionals and the public, including a National Public Awareness Campaign to increase awareness and knowledge of postpartum depression and psychosis. This could include public service announcements through television and radio and focus on:

- Raising awareness about screening;
- Educating new mothers and their families about postpartum conditions to promote earlier diagnosis and treatment;
- Ensuring that such education includes complete information concerning postpartum conditions, including its symptoms, methods of coping with the illness and treatment resources.

SERVICES

What is the grant program created in the new law?

The Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services may make grants to eligible entities for projects for the establishment, operation, and coordination of effective and cost-efficient systems for the delivery of essential services to individuals with or at risk for postpartum conditions and their families.

What type of activities could the grants be used for?

In general, the projects should provide education and services with respect to the diagnosis and management of postpartum conditions for individuals with or at risk for postpartum conditions and their families. This could include projects that:

- Deliver or enhance outpatient and home-based health and support services, including case management and comprehensive treatment services.
- Deliver or enhance inpatient care management services that ensure the well-being of the mother and family and the future development of the infant.
- Improve the quality, availability, and organization of health care and support services (including transportation services, attendant care, homemaker services, day or respite care, and providing counseling on financial assistance and insurance).
- Provide education about postpartum conditions to promote earlier diagnosis and treatment. In these cases, the projects could:
 - Provide complete information on postpartum conditions, symptoms, methods of coping with the illness, and treatment resources; and
 - When the grantee that is a State, hospital, or birthing facility, the grants should be used to educate new mothers and family members about postpartum depression before new mothers leave the health facility and to ensure that training programs regarding such education are carried out at the health facility.

Who will be eligible to receive a grant?

Makes grants available to public or nonprofit private entity, which may include a State or local government, a public-private partnership, a recipient of a grant under the Healthy Start program, a public or nonprofit private hospital, community-based organization, hospice, ambulatory care facility, community health center, migrant health center, public housing primary care center, or homeless health center, or any other appropriate public or nonprofit private entity.

How much will the grant program cost?

The new law authorizes \$3 million for the grant program.

SCREENING

What does this new law include on screening for postpartum depression?

First, as you can see above, the new law allows for increased research on the development of improved screening and diagnostic techniques and it allows for increased awareness about screening.

Second, the new law requires that the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services conduct a study on the benefits of screening for postpartum depression and must submit that report to Congress by March 2012.

Finally, in another provision in the healthcare reform law, the new law requires all new health plans to cover comprehensive women's preventive care and screenings and cover these recommended services at no cost to women. These preventive services covered will be based off of guidelines supported by the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) and they could include postpartum depression screening.