

# Co-Creating Change:

## Engaging Birthing People & Communities in Maternity Care Quality Improvement

Maternity care outcomes in the United States and Michigan remain unacceptably poor and are marked by persistent variability in health outcomes, especially affecting Black birthing people, those living on low incomes, and residents of rural areas. Yet, even as organizations strive to improve these outcomes, the experiences and voices of birthing people are too often left out of the conversation. The [Obstetrics Initiative \(OBI\)](#) is working to change that by making patient engagement an essential part of our efforts.

### Partnering For Change

In 2023, with funding from the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services, we launched a Patient and Community Action Board (PCAB). The PCAB plays a crucial role in OBI's mission to improve health outcomes and promote better births for all across Michigan. Our PCAB members serve as bridges between healthcare professionals, health systems, and the communities they represent, ensuring that patient and community voices are at the center of our quality improvement efforts.

OBI has engaged with our PCAB through several methods, such as:



**Providing guidance, input, and recommendations on OBI initiatives**, including mission and vision statements.



**Evaluating resources**, such as patient recruitment flyers, patient-facing scripts, and hospital reports.



**Refining surveys** to better capture and incorporate patient voices, with a focus on understanding experiences in clinical and hospital settings.



**Delivering presentations** to partners, such as Perinatal Quality Collaboratives and over 65 maternity care hospitals, statewide.



**Reviewing and supporting grant applications** for new initiatives.

### Building Your PCAB: A Step-by-Step Guide to Patient Engagement

The following seven-step process is designed to guide you in launching and supporting your own PCAB, ensuring that the experiences and expertise of patients and the community are prioritized and at the forefront of your efforts.

#### Step 1: Develop a Clear Charter

Start by drafting a project charter that defines the roles, responsibilities, and scope of your PCAB. Include onboarding and offboarding processes, training needs, meeting frequency, and support resources to create a structured, respectful environment. Ensure expectations, communication methods, and review periods with internal and legal teams are transparent from the start. [View a sample PCAB Charter.](#)



*Consider naming your group an "Action Board" to highlight your commitment to meaningful member input and shared decision-making.*

## Step 2: Secure Internal Support and Collaboration

Build strong internal alignment by sharing your draft charter early and inviting feedback from your team. Make sure everyone understands the PCAB's purpose and their role in supporting its work. Organize introductory meetings to clarify expectations and discuss collaboration processes.



*In-person gatherings, such as lunches or informal meetups, can strengthen team relationships and pave the way for a successful partnership.*

## Step 3: Recruit Purposefully and Inclusively

With foundational processes in place, design a recruitment strategy that aligns with your board's goals and community priorities. Target individuals with lived experience and engage partners from community organizations to ensure a broad range of perspectives and backgrounds are represented.

Ensure the recruitment experience is welcoming: share your mission, listen actively, and ask about any accommodations needed to support participation.



*Prioritize open dialogue to build trust, identify support needs, and assess alignment between lived experiences/expertise and your organizational needs, priorities and goals early.*

## Step 4: Onboard and Orient Thoughtfully

Welcome new PCAB members with a comprehensive orientation session. Review the finalized charter, clarify roles, and lay out meeting logistics and expectations together. Encourage members to discuss priorities, name potential barriers, and collaborate on solutions. Complete required training and build a shared understanding of group values and goals. [View a sample PCAB interest form.](#)



*Explore resources like [MoMMA Voices Patient Family Partnership \(PFP\) Training](#) or the [MSHIELD website](#) resources to strengthen orientation and support ongoing education.*

## Step 5: Officially Launch Your PCAB

Congratulations - your Patient and Community Action Board (PCAB) is ready for its first meeting! To ensure a successful kickoff:

- **Select the Meeting Format:** Decide if your first meeting will be virtual or in-person based on members' locations and needs. Make necessary arrangements for accessibility, transportation, refreshments, and technology.
- **Prepare the Agenda:** Include icebreakers and team-building activities to foster connection. Clarify project goals and board roles and provide ample opportunity for open discussions. Encourage members to share questions, expectations, and any potential barriers to participation.
- **Clarify Team Involvement:** Determine which organizational staff will attend and what support they'll offer during the launch.
- **Secure Commitments:** Ensure all new PCAB members have reviewed and signed the charter before the first meeting, so roles and responsibilities are clear.
- **Determine Stipend Logistics:** If offering stipends, confirm processes for payment amounts, frequency, and method.

## Step 6: Foster Ongoing Engagement and Structure

Maintain your PCAB's momentum and impact with steady organization and communication:

- **Timely Communication:** Send out meeting invites and agendas in advance. Establish regular meeting schedules to build consistency.
- **Document Processes:** Keep track of signed charters, completed trainings, and operational procedures, such as action item follow-up.
- **Sustain Connection:** Stay in touch between meetings to check in with members, recognize contributions, and surface additional support needs.
- **Promote Accountability:** Assign clear roles for administrative duties, note-taking, and follow-up.



*Building trust and engagement takes time—ensure members feel valued and heard by proactively seeking feedback and providing updates on the board's impact.*

## Step 7: Evaluate, Learn, and Grow

Ongoing evaluation is key to ensuring your PCAB's effectiveness and adaptability:

- **Track Engagement:** Use forms or checklists to log activities, such as initiative reviews, presentations, or feedback requests, to document PCAB involvement.
- **Collect Feedback:** Create structured opportunities for both members and partners to share their experiences and suggestions via surveys, focus groups, or regular check-ins.
- **Reflect on Impact:** Regularly assess how PCAB input informs decisions and outcomes. Share these successes with your organization and the board, highlighting tangible changes and lessons learned.
- **Continuously Improve:** Use insights from feedback to refine processes, remove participation barriers, and strengthen your engagement strategy.



*Celebrating milestones and recognizing member contributions keeps motivation high and demonstrates the board's vital role in quality improvement.*

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## References:

1. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). (2024, April 8). Working together to reduce Black maternal mortality. Women's Health. <https://www.cdc.gov/womens-health/features/maternal-mortality.html>

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