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**Joint Center Commission Report Says More Research, Policy Changes
Needed to Boost Involvement of Expectant Fathers in Pregnancy Outcomes**

WASHINGTON – A report by a commission of public health experts has issued a set of policy and research recommendations aimed at supporting and enhancing the role that expectant fathers can play in ensuring healthy pregnancies and infants.

Among the many recommendations released today by the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies' *Commission on Paternal Involvement in Pregnancy Outcomes* are reducing the marriage penalty on the Earned Income Tax Credit, amending the Family and Medical Leave Act to include paid time off for new fathers, and making changes in the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program to encourage and support paternal involvement.

The recommendations were contained in an "outlook report" released by the Commission at an event today on Capitol Hill with Congressman Danny K. Davis (D-IL) looking on.

In the document, the Commission also recommended that the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and other national public health agencies expand their programs aimed at preconception health and reproductive life planning to include a greater emphasis on the roles and health of fathers, while calling on major public health programs and health-related professional and industry associations to advance education and awareness-raising on the roles of fathers throughout pregnancy and childbirth.

Additionally, the Commission pointed to a gap in knowledge about the role fathers can play in improving pregnancy outcomes, and it made a number of recommendations for improving research and clinical practice in this area, as well as on the types of strategies that are effective in enhancing paternal involvement.

"While we need to address the lack of research, we do know enough to say that men are vitally important to healthy pregnancies and healthy births," said Ralph B. Everett, President and CEO of the Joint Center. "To that end, the Commission has done a great job putting together these recommendations for policy changes to improve paternal involvement in pregnancy outcomes, while pointing the direction toward improving our knowledge of doing so can lead to healthier families."

"If we are going to improve maternal and child health in America, we are going to have to strengthen families and fatherhood," said Michael Lu, M.D., M.P.H., an Associate Professor of obstetrics and gynecology and public health at UCLA's Schools of Medicine and Public Health in Los Angeles who co-chaired the Commission.

Although the nation's infant mortality rate has decreased over the past decade, the U.S. still ranks only 28th among developed countries, with the rate for African Americans almost double that for whites. Standard risk factors for pregnancies account for only a small fraction of this variation.

“While health practitioners and public health agencies have made strides in addressing many of the risk factors that affect pregnancy, we think the issue of improving paternal involvement holds a great deal of promise for reducing infant mortality rates in the black community,” said Jermane Bond, Ph.D., the Joint Center Research Associate who is directing the work of the Commission. “Today the Commission has given us a pathway for unlocking the potential that exists for expectant fathers to be an even bigger part of the solution.”

The Commission is co-chaired by Dr. Lu and Willie J. Parker, M.D., M.P.H., Medical Director of Planned Parenthood of Metropolitan Washington, DC. Its work is funded with a grant from the Office of Minority Health in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

The Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies is one of the nation's leading research and public policy institutions and the only one whose work focuses primarily on issues of particular concern to African Americans and other people of color. The Joint Center is celebrating its 40th Anniversary this year. To learn more, please visit www.jointcenter.org.

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