

# Healthy Start Helps Mothers Have Healthy Babies



Baltimore City  
**Healthy Start, Inc.**

*I'm Dr. Linda Whitby*, and I'm an obstetrician/gynecologist working with Baltimore City Healthy Start. Healthy Start needed to hire an OB/GYN because women were waiting for their Medicaid card to arrive for as long as four weeks. Then they were waiting up to another month for an OB appointment. These delays in prenatal care are unacceptable.

**Over 20% of Maryland women do not receive prenatal care in their first trimester**

(DHMH, Maryland Vital Statistics Report 2007)

One of the biggest problems the women I see have in accessing Medical Assistance is not being able to prove who they are. They don't have a birth certificate and they may be living with a neighbor or a distant relative. They can't get a Medicaid care without a birth certificate. I also see a real need for electronic medical records; changing doctors should not mean having to start all over again and wasting time and resources.



Healthy Start physician **Linda Whitby, MD**, and President and CEO **Alma Roberts, MPH, FACHE**

*“Infant mortality and maternal health really affect everyone.”*

I've worked all over the state of Maryland – from southern Maryland to Havre de Grace – but I really have a passion for Baltimore City. I wanted to be involved with a program that's making a difference, one that's doing something new. During a first visit with a pregnant woman, I give her space to talk, ask questions, and be heard. This sets up a line of communication. It's common for women to come here with risks to their pregnancies like vaginal infections, bladder infections, and even dental infections. Others are being abused, and their children are being abused by their partners. They don't know what they need. So we teach, we do pap smears and blood work. But we also listen and give support. We make a plan together.

Infant mortality and maternal health really affect everyone, so Healthy Start provides holistic services above and beyond health care. Our clients learn life skills in our computer lab and we address interconception health issues. Our Belly Buddies prenatal program focuses on relieving stress during pregnancy – just letting women have a safe place to talk can make such a difference. We believe that stress caused by racial discrimination, weathering and poverty is really the kernel of disparities in infant mortality. Comprehensively addressing the needs of at-risk women can and does make a difference.