



*Adopted by the COHC Board of Directors on June 17, 2025*

## **Community Standards on Perinatal Loss Care**

Stillbirth is a tragic and profound experience that affects families throughout Franklin County and across the United States. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, stillbirth affects about 1 in 175 births, and each year about 21,000 babies are stillborn in the United States. That is about the same as the number of babies that die during the first year of life.

Central Ohio hospitals feel strongly that all parents who experience perinatal loss must receive high quality, supportive bereavement care. The four Franklin County hospital systems have collaborated to develop these “Community Standards on Perinatal Loss Care” aimed at identifying and spreading best practices around the care of mothers and families who have experienced perinatal loss. Representatives from hospital maternity units and bereavement and chaplain services worked together to develop this set of standards for optimal care that should be provided to parents and families suffering a perinatal loss at any Franklin County hospital. The standards were developed in partnership with Miles Mission, which was created in 2021 to support individuals navigating the heartache of pregnancy and infant loss.

When developing the components of optimal bereavement care, representatives from the four hospital systems identified the following shared principles:

- Education should be provided to pregnant women at high risk of a stillbirth during prenatal care visits.
- Optimal bereavement care after a stillbirth includes clear communication and shared decision making between the parents and healthcare providers involved in their care. Parents are supported to make informed choices.
- For all stillbirths, there should be a recognition of parenthood and acknowledgement of a mother’s, their partners’ and families’ grief.
- Prior to discharge, parents should be made aware of and can access burial, cremation, and funeral services, and are linked with emotional and mental health support.



- Hospital Perinatal Loss Committees established at each inpatient site include champions who have experience with perinatal loss either personally or as a family member.
- Bereavement care training is provided to all health professionals involved in the care of bereaved parents and family members.
- Health professionals involved in bereavement care can access self-care support and resources.

Under this initiative, the hospital systems will conduct internal reviews of existing policies and identify updates to those policies to ensure that they meet the following components of the “Community Standards on Perinatal Loss Care.”

#### Optimal Care Practices for Parents and Family Members Following Perinatal Loss

Hospitals will offer all bereaved parents the opportunity to use a Cuddle Cot, which is a flexible cooling pad that allows extended time for parents and families to hold their baby, take photos, create memories, travel for extended families and make arrangements without feeling rushed.

Hospitals will place the mother and baby in a room that is away from other laboring patients and mark the room with an indicator so that staff knows there has been a fetal loss.

Hospitals will not limit the number of family members or visitors that are able to share in the grief of the infant loss.

Hospitals will strive to provide one-to-one staffing for parents experiencing perinatal loss. If one-on-one care is not available at a given time, hospitals will strive to ensure that staff caring for patients in delivery are not also caring for parents that have experienced an infant loss.

Hospital staff will provide family of the deceased infant with clear communication on test results or examinations performed during the hospital stay.

#### Bereavement Care Training of Health Professionals

Hospitals will develop and implement perinatal loss educational programs that is provided to all healthcare professionals involved in the care of bereaved parents and family members, including nurses, social workers, OB physicians and residents and spiritual/pastoral care.

Hospital training programs will incorporate strategies for talking with parents and family members about their pregnancy loss including recognition of their grief.

Specific training should be provided to nursing staff and other front-line caregivers on:

- How to make/assemble mementos provided in take-home boxes
- How to properly use and maintain Cuddle Cots
  - Cuddle Cots provides online training modules at:  
<https://cuddlecot.com/manuals/>
- Tips for taking pictures in a compassionate way of infants and families.

Specific training should be provided to OB physicians and residents on how to support parents and family members beyond the clinical care provided.

Training should be provided at orientation for all appropriate healthcare professionals and reinforced at regular intervals determined by nursing leadership.

- Some hospitals have partnered with and recommend Sufficient Grace Ministries, based in Deshler, Ohio, for bereavement training for healthcare professionals. More information can be found at:  
<https://sufficientgraceministries.org/>

### Optimal Support Practices for Parents and Families

Hospitals will provide parents with take-home boxes with items and resources that help families with their grief.

Hospital will develop processes to link parents to burial, cremation and funeral services and will support parents in their decision making for these services.

Hospital will develop processes to link parents to family support, such as bereavement counseling, and outside organizations that support pregnancy loss.

- Hospital spiritual and pastoral care personnel should be provided with updated tools and resources needed to assist parents and families during their hospital stay and after discharge.

Hospitals will provide parents with resources and information on the acquisition of a Report of Fetal Death.