



2012 Sapphire Award Winner (\$30,000) Excellence in Community Health—Individual



Charles S. Mahan, M.D.

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The Lawton and Rhea Chiles Center for Healthy Mothers and Babies*

Dr. Charles S. Mahan's colleagues consider him to be the champion of maternal and child health in Florida and a national leader in the field as well. Mahan founded The Lawton and Rhea Chiles Center at the University of South Florida (USF) where he is currently Professor Emeritus, to ensure intervention and implementation science for maternal and child health continues in the future.

Prior to his work at USF, Mahan was Florida's State Health Officer under Governor Lawton Chiles' leadership. In this role he implemented the first accountability measurement system for county health departments to identify their level of effectiveness and appropriate use of public funds. He substantially strengthened public health data systems to analyze birth and other health outcomes to identify where attention was needed. These efforts led to the creation of Florida Charts.

Mahan had an understanding that low-income, rural and minority neighbors were not receiving equal health care access. While working as Florida's State Health Officer, he established the Healthy Mothers, Healthy Babies initiative to develop quality prenatal and maternal health care for all women, especially minority and uninsured women.

Mahan was also influential in expanding the Medicaid income eligibility threshold for pregnant women from 100 to 185 percent of the Federal poverty rate. This greatly increased the number of women who could be served. In addition, he was able to persuade the Florida Legislature to increase Medicaid reimbursement rates that expanded the number of obstetricians willing to serve low-income women.

Mahan recognized that improving birth and maternal health outcomes requires community engagement and was instrumental in forming Florida's Healthy Start Program to address these needs. This program established 30 coalitions throughout Florida to develop maternal and child health service delivery and fund allocation plans based on local issues and conditions. Healthy Start created better care for expectant mothers and infant children, resulting in a decrease in Florida's infant mortality rate. In the 1990s Florida's infant mortality rate finally measured below the national average for the first time. This innovative program was later implemented in other states.

"There is unlikely a community in Florida that has an organization dedicated to improving birth and child health outcomes that does not trace its existence back to Dr. Mahan," said Edward A. Feaver, a former colleague at USF.

Also, as the State Health Officer in the late 1980s and early 1990s, Mahan led the public health response to the HIV/AIDS outbreak when there was almost no public understanding of or support for responding to the disease. In fact, Mahan was responsible for securing the first Ryan White Act grant for Florida. Monies from the grant provide HIV-related services for those who do not have sufficient health care coverage or financial resources for coping with HIV.

In addition to Mahan's work in Florida, he directed national programs to improve maternal and child health outcomes. He is also currently the president of the National Board of Public Health Examiners (NBPHE), an organization he was instrumental in starting. NBPHE was the first organization to certify state and local public health agencies.

For more information about The Lawton and Rhea Chiles Center for Healthy Mothers and Babies, visit <http://health.usf.edu/publichealth/chilescenter> or call (813) 974-8888.