In 2006, infant mortality was identified as a health priority for Hamilton County as well as the state of Tennessee. Tennessee’s infant mortality rate (IMR) was the 6th highest in the country. Within Tennessee, Hamilton County had the 2nd highest IMR (11.7 per 1,000) compared to other metropolitan areas and had the highest African American IMR (23.7 per 1,000).

The Hamilton County Core Leadership Group (now the IRIS Umbrella Project) was initiated in the fall of 2007 with funding by the Governor’s Office of Children’s Care Coordination to identify and implement evidence-based approaches to reduce Hamilton County’s infant mortality rate. Since that time, the CLG/IRIS Umbrella Project in partnership with other community organizations have launched a variety of programs aimed at reducing infant mortality.

The 2016 infant mortality rate in Hamilton County was 7.7 per 1,000 births, which represents a substantial decrease from the 2006 rate of 11.7. In addition, the 2016 IMR is nearing the state rate of 7.4.

Declining infant mortality among African Americans is driving the trend. While disparities remain, infant mortality rates between African American and white infants has narrowed significantly.

In Hamilton County the infant mortality rate among African Americans has markedly decreased, thus narrowing the gap.