

A BABY BOOM IN FLINT? BIRTHS RISE NEARLY 10% FOLLOWING LAUNCH OF RX KIDS

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

While national and state birth rates continued their decades-long decline, **Flint, Michigan, experienced a nearly 10% increase in births in 2024**, marking the city's largest year-over-year rise in at least 25 years. Michigan vital records show a 9.7% increase in births between 2023 and 2024, with the largest gains among **older mothers (ages 30–39), first-time mothers, and mothers with higher educational attainment.**

This shift coincided with the January 2024 launch of **Rx Kids**, the nation's first universal maternal and infant cash prescription program, which achieved near-universal participation among eligible families. While additional years of data and formal causal analyses are needed, several plausible pathways link Rx Kids to the observed increase in births, including increased pregnancies, higher rates of pregnancies carried to term, and changes in migration patterns among expectant families.

About Rx Kids:

Rx Kids is the nation's first **community-wide and unconditional prenatal and infant cash prescription program**. Designed to proactively address the economic shock of pregnancy and childbirth, Rx Kids prescribes **\$1,500 during mid-pregnancy and \$500 per month** throughout the infancy to all eligible families in participating communities.

The program launched in Flint, Michigan, in January 2024 and has since expanded to dozens of communities across the state. Preliminary findings—consistent with global evidence on child cash transfers—suggest improvements in family financial security, maternal and infant health, maternal mental health, health care utilization, child welfare involvement, civic engagement, and community reinvestment.¹

Rx Kids is a program of the Michigan State University Pediatric Public Health Initiative and is administered by GiveDirectly, a global leader in cash transfer delivery. As a public-private partnership, Rx Kids is supported by the State of Michigan alongside philanthropic and other partners. More about Rx Kids at RxKids.org.

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BACKGROUND RE: DROPPING BIRTH RATES AND WHY THAT IS IMPORTANT

Like other high-income countries, the United States has experienced a sustained decline in fertility over recent decades.^{2,3} Michigan reflects this trend. At the turn of the millennium, approximately 135,000 babies were born annually in the state, corresponding to a birth rate of 14 per 1,000 residents. By 2023, births had fallen below 100,000 per year—fewer than 10 births per 1,000 residents.⁴

Fertility declines are driven by multiple factors, including expanded educational and employment opportunities for women, rising costs of childrearing, later ages at marriage and childbirth, increased access to contraception, and shifting social norms around family size.^{5,6} These pressures are particularly acute in the United States, where pregnancy and infancy represent the **largest economic shock across the life course**, driven by income loss, limited paid leave, and substantial new expenses.⁷

BIRTHS INCREASED IN FLINT IN 2024, COINCIDING WITH Rx KIDS

Provisional data from Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) Vital Records (birth certificate data) indicate that **94 additional babies were born in Flint in 2024**, representing a 9.7% increase over 2023—the city’s largest year-over-year increase in more than 25 years. This rise reflects both an increase in total births and an increase in Flint’s crude birth rate, calculated using American Community Survey population estimates.

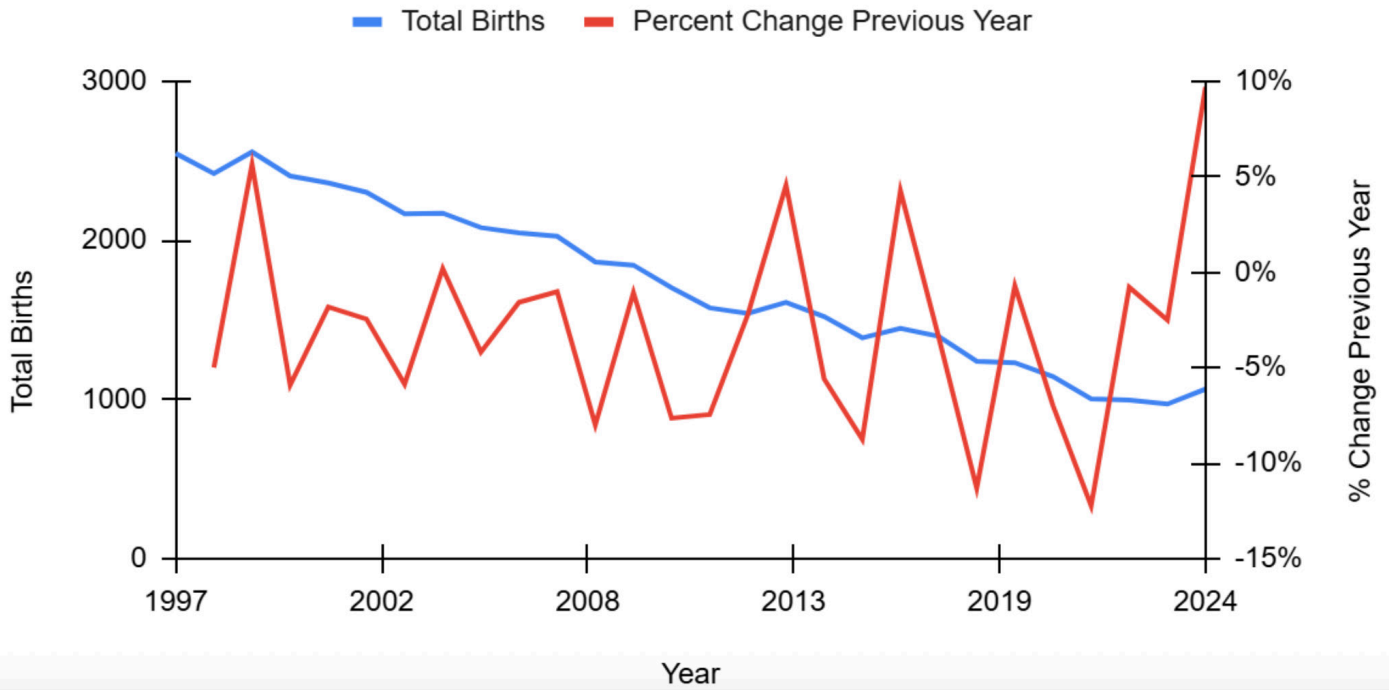
In contrast, Michigan experienced continued declines in both births and birth rates over the same period. Flint’s reversal occurred during the first year of Rx Kids implementation, following years in which the city’s birth trends closely mirrored statewide declines.

Summary of the total births and birth rates in Flint, Michigan compared to statewide

Year	Flint Births	Flint Birth Rate	Michigan Births	Michigan Birth Rate
2021	1,004	12.45	105,022	10.4
2022	996	12.47	100,880	10.2
2023	971	12.19	99,634	9.9
2024	1,065	13.37	99,413	9.8

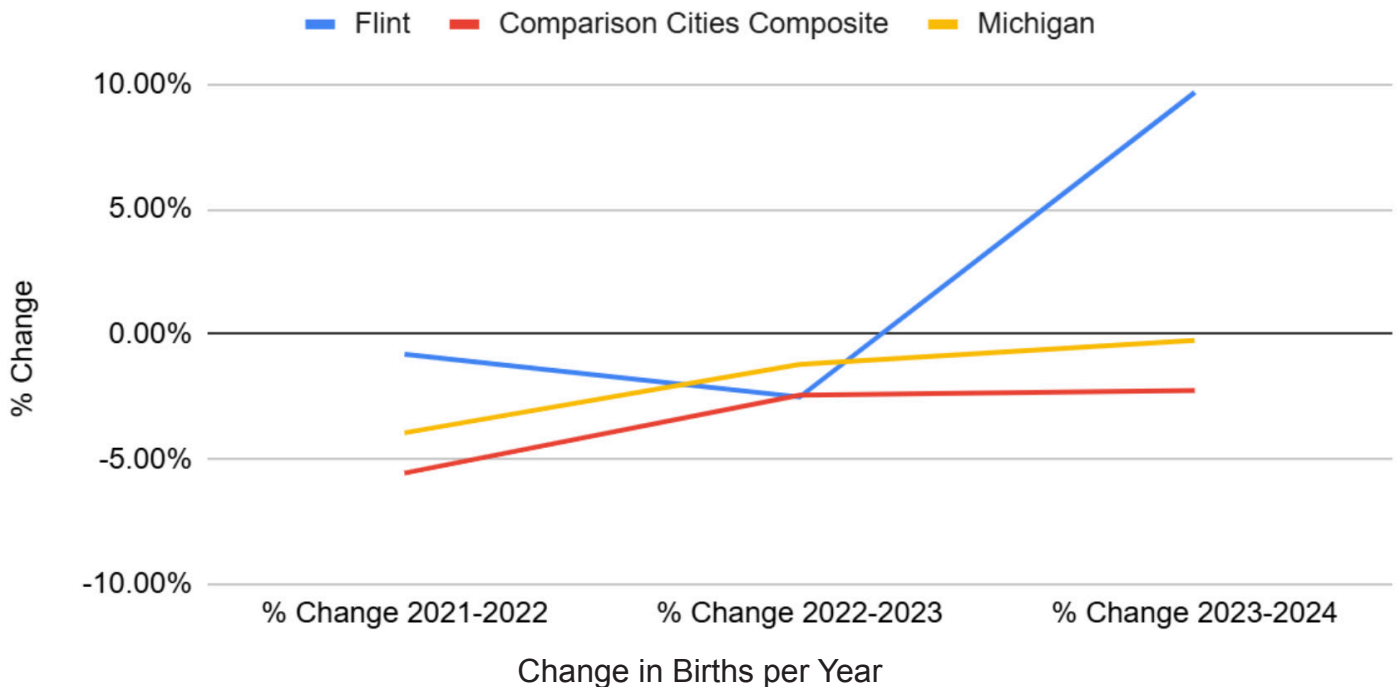
Source: Birth counts from State of Michigan Vital Records birth certificate data. Birth rate estimates divided by population count estimates from the American Community Survey.

Flint Total Births & Total Birth Percent Change from Previous Year (1997-2024)



Source: 1997-2024 Geocoded Michigan Birth Certificate Registries; Division for Vital Records & Health Statistics, Michigan Department of Health & Human Services. <https://www.mdch.state.mi.us/osr/Chi/births14/frame.html>

Percent Change in Births: Flint, Comparison Cities, & Michigan (2021-2024)



Source: MDHHS Division for Vital Records and Health Statistics (2021-2024).

*Our matched comparison cities were selected based on a set of criteria designed to be demographically similar to the City of Flint based on population size, poverty rate, and racial composition. Matched comparison cities include those with a population of 5,000 to 125,000, a poverty rate of greater or equal to 15%, and a non-Hispanic Black population of at least 20%, determined by using the U.S. Census Bureau's 2019-2023 American Community Survey.⁸ The selected cities include Benton Harbor, Pontiac, Saginaw, Muskegon Heights, Inkster, River Rouge, Ecorse, Highland Park, Beecher, Muskegon, Bridgeport, Albion, Harper Woods, Eastpointe, Lansing, East Lansing, Wayne, Ypsilanti, Ypsilanti Township, Jackson, St. Louis, Buena Vista Township, and Benton Township.

The previous chart on page 4 displays the year-over-year percent change in total births from 2021 to 2024 for the City of Flint, our matched comparison cities*, and the state of Michigan. We calculated the percent change in births by subtracting the number of births in the previous year from the subsequent year, then dividing by the previous year's total. From 2021 to 2024, all locations experienced a decline in births, except Flint. Between 2023 and 2024, Flint saw a substantial 9.68% increase in total births.

2021-2024 FLINT BIRTH DEMOGRAPHICS

Not only are women in Flint having more babies, but the demographic profile of mothers is changing. Mirroring trends in the state and nation,^{9,10} moms in Flint are older and more educated than in recent years. Flint also had an increase in first-births.

Maternal Age

Although births increased across all age groups in 2024, **the largest absolute gains occurred among mothers aged 30–39**. Mothers aged 30 and older accounted for 36% of all Flint births in 2024, up from 31% in 2021, indicating that older mothers drove a substantial share of the increase.

Summary of the total number and percentage of live births to Flint, MI mothers between 2021 and 2024 by maternal age

Maternal Age	2021		2022		2023		2024	
	Number	% all births	Number	% all births	Number	% all births	Number	% all births
≤19	101	10%	83	8%	75	8%	99	9%
20-29	591	59%	597	60%	574	59%	586	55%
30-39	292	29%	298	30%	304	31%	357	34%
≥40	20	2%	18	2%	18	2%	22	2%

Source: MDHHS Division for Vital Records and Health Statistics (2021-2024)

Maternal Education

Between 2023 and 2024, births increased across all maternal education levels. Historically, most mothers in Flint had lower educational attainment. However, in 2024, **women with some college education saw the largest absolute increase, with 37 additional births.** The most dramatic relative change occurred among highly educated mothers—those with a bachelor’s degree or higher experienced a 64% increase, representing 28 additional births.

Summary of the total number and percentage of live births to Flint, MI mothers between 2021 and 2024 by education

Maternal Education	2021		2022		2023		2024	
	Number	% all births	Number	% all births	Number	% all births	Number	% all births
Less than high school or high school education or GED	581	58%	558	57%	586	60%	605	57%
Some college, no degree	276	28%	309	31%	293	30%	330	31%
Associate’s degree	60	6%	59	6%	47	5%	56	5%
Bachelor’s degree or more	80	8%	63	6%	44	5%	72	7%

Source: MDHHS Division for Vital Records and Health Statistics (2021-2024)

Number of Previous Live Births

In 2024, first-time mothers drove the largest increase in births, with 62 additional babies born to women having their first child. Mothers with one previous birth showed the next largest increase at 22 additional births.

Summary of the total number and percentage of live births to Flint, MI mothers between 2021 and 2024 by number of previous births

Previous Live Births	2021		2022		2023		2024	
	Number	% all births	Number	% all births	Number	% all births	Number	% all births
0 previous births	262	26%	191	19%	217	22%	279	26%
1 previous birth	222	22%	230	23%	209	22%	231	22%
2 previous births	167	17%	171	17%	176	18%	167	16%
3 previous births	121	12%	151	15%	131	13%	139	13%
4+ previous births	231	23%	253	26%	238	25%	248	23%

Source: MDHHS Division for Vital Records and Health Statistics (2021-2024)

WHY ARE THERE MORE BABIES?

The reasons for Flint’s increase in births are not yet fully understood. However, three plausible and non-mutually exclusive pathways may explain the observed trend: (1) an increase in pregnancies, (2) an increase in pregnancies carried to term, and (3) changes in migration patterns among expectant families.

Notably, Flint’s reversal followed more than two decades of declining births and occurred in the context of continued statewide declines. Did Rx Kids—the groundbreaking community-wide effort to support mothers and babies—drive this change? The timing is consistent with this.

Rx Kids cash prescriptions could facilitate Flint’s growing families in a variety of ways:

1) Increase in Pregnancies

It is possible that the economic stability afforded by Rx Kids and the values and messaging of the program—exemplifying love, dignity, celebration, deservingness, trust, agency, and freedom—may have contributed to the rise in births in Flint.

Experts suggest that, while the reasons for the declining fertility rate are multi-faceted, one reason may be parents not finding “the right moment.” Research finds that, while the number of children that young people intend to have has not changed appreciably,¹¹ American adults are finding it harder and harder to achieve that goal.^{12,13} We hypothesize that there are two primary barriers to meeting this goal: 1) having children is expensive and those expenses are borne by the family without community help; and 2) diminished optimism about their children’s prospects for health and happiness amid broader concerns about the future.

Evidence from a recent Rx Kids survey finds that the program is addressing both financial and psychological barriers to childbearing. Compared to three matched control groups, Rx Kids-eligible mothers were significantly more economically stable, more likely to report they have enough of the kinds of foods they want, less likely to be behind on housing payments, and less likely to have been evicted.¹⁴ Rx Kids cash prescriptions may help families feel more financially capable of having a child, particularly given the average \$20,000 cost of an infant’s first year.¹⁵

Beyond financial relief, researchers suggest that pessimism about the future can delay or prevent childbearing. The same survey found that Rx Kids mothers showed significantly fewer depressive symptoms and expressed greater hope for the future than their matched peers without the support of Rx Kids.¹⁴ It is possible this increased hopefulness may increase the likelihood of having a child.

“I’m so glad I live in Flint. We waited a long time to have kids because we weren’t financially stable. We’re still not stable, but at 33, we didn’t want to wait any longer to have kids. Knowing that we’ll have a cushion of \$500 each month makes me feel a smidge better.” - Rx Kids Mom

2) Increase in Pregnancies Carried to Term

Economic stability (anticipated and actual) during pregnancy supports healthy pregnancies, from improved nutrition and housing security, less stress, increased health care utilization, or other potential pathways.¹⁶ As a result, Rx Kids cash prescriptions may prevent miscarriages, although this will be impossible to fully assess because the majority of miscarriages occur before a woman may even know if she is pregnant.

The most common reason for seeking an abortion is financial concerns with having a child.^{17,18} Furthermore, most women who have an abortion are low-income. In 2023, women in Flint had nearly 1000 abortions.¹⁹ It is possible that in 2024, Rx Kids cash

prescriptions enabled some women to keep a pregnancy when in previous years they would have chosen to abort. As of 2024, the State of Michigan no longer collects comprehensive data on abortion data, so this pathway will be impossible to fully assess.

“THANK YOU so much. Welcoming a new baby is a joy, and having some extra money to get us started with our little guy was so helpful. I have told pregnant friends about the program, and we all agree it is such an incredible gift. I think moms in need can make the decision to keep their baby with this help, and it’s such a great program.”
- Rx Kids Mom

3) Migration

Finally, Rx Kids may have influenced where families choose to have children, either attracting expectant parents to Flint or encouraging current residents to remain in the city rather than relocate during pregnancy. We have suggestive evidence that the increase in births is not entirely due to the residential choices of expectant mothers.

If the increase in births was due to people moving to Flint, then we would expect:

1. Moms who are new to Flint to have the same demographic profile of the moms for whom we see the greatest increase in births. Rather, moms who are new to Flint are mostly in their 20s, whereas we see the greatest increase in births among moms in their 30s.
2. Neighboring areas to Flint to experience a decrease in births. The logic here is that Flint would attract local expectant mothers. Rather, the areas surrounding Flint do not have a decrease in births.
3. The areas closest to the border of Flint to show the greatest increases, following the logic that expectant mothers would prefer to stay within their neighborhood and move just past the border into Flint to qualify for Rx Kids. Rather, births increase throughout Flint.

“I moved to Flint in 2018 and didn’t expect to stay. I’m proud to live in a city that values its families. This city gave me roots. Rx Kids helped us grow.” - Rx Kids Mom

CONCLUSION

After decades of declining births, Flint experienced a nearly 10% increase in births in 2024 among older moms, first-time moms, and higher educated moms. This is the largest single-year increase in at least 25 years—along with an increase in the city’s birth rate. This reversal coincided with the launch of Rx Kids, the nation’s first community-wide and unconditional prenatal and infant cash prescription program.

While additional years of data and formal causal analyses are needed, several Rx Kids-related mechanisms plausibly explain this increase, including increased pregnancies, higher rates of pregnancies carried to term, and changes in migration patterns among expectant families.

To further understand the impact of Rx Kids on births, the Rx Kids research team will continue to follow trends in Flint, as well as in the other Rx Kids communities. In addition, we will incorporate questions about pregnancies and migration in future data collection.

Pregnancy and childbirth represent the greatest economic shock across the life course in the United States, with far-reaching consequences for families and communities. A modest, cash intervention like Rx Kids—delivered with dignity—may not only improve maternal and infant health and family financial security, but also help parents achieve the family size they desire.

If Rx Kids continues to have a sustained increase in births, it would advance the research on the association of cash transfers and childbearing and it would offer a promising solution—that is simple, efficient, cost-effective, and scalable—to declining birth rates in Michigan—and many other communities in the United States and across the world.

ENDNOTES

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