

## **Description of the Arkansas Reproductive Health Monitoring System**

### **History:**

Founded in 1980, the birth defect surveillance program in Arkansas is one of the oldest birth defect surveillance systems in the United States. In February 1985, a legislative act was passed by the State of Arkansas 75<sup>th</sup> General Assembly and signed by former President Bill Clinton (who was then the Governor of Arkansas) to officially establish and appropriate funding for the Arkansas Reproductive Health Monitoring System (ARHMS).

From 1985 to 1995, ARHMS began monitoring about a quarter to a third of the births in the state for selected congenital anomalies. In 1995, ARHMS received a 3-year Cooperative Agreement from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to enhance its state-based birth defects surveillance system. The funding from this Agreement enabled true statewide expansion. ARHMS began surveying all births in the state for the presence of birth defects and surveyed births statewide as far back to 1993.

By 2008, ARHMS was fully funded with state appropriations. With these additional state dollars, ARHMS has allowed researchers in the state to compete and win funding for multiple birth defect research studies.

### **Research Center:**

The Birth Defect Prevention Act of 1996 enabled CDC to issue a request for application from all states to establish Centers of Excellence in the Research and Prevention of Birth Defects. The Arkansas registry is now the home of one of ten CDC-funded Centers of Excellence in Birth Defects Research and Prevention.

ARHMS was initially established with the purpose of monitoring adverse reproductive outcomes, including birth defects, and reporting occurrence and trends for these adverse events. Over the past 30+ years, ARHMS has expanded and grown from being simply a repository of collected data to serving as the resource hub and foundation of the Arkansas Center for Birth Defects Research and Prevention which uses the data collected to conduct local and national epidemiologic research studies to investigate the causes of birth defects. Information gleaned from these studies is used for the prevention, advocacy and education of Arkansans and their families affected by birth defects.

### **National recognition:**

With increased funding and statewide surveillance, ARHMS has become one of the most well-known and well-respected birth defect registries in the country. In 2002, ARHMS was one of 8 state registries to receive a grade of "A" from the health advocacy group Trust for America's Health.

### **Surveillance methods:**

ARHMS uses population-based, active surveillance methods to monitor birth defects diagnosed prenatally and among children less than 2 years old. ARHMS is state-wide and monitors all pregnancy outcomes among all Arkansas residents. An abstraction team, composed of specially-trained professionals in health information management, travel throughout the state and review medical records from discharge diagnosis in all Arkansas hospitals that provide obstetrical or pediatric care, as well as some pediatric specialty-care clinics and prenatal diagnosis centers. Currently, ARHMS monitors all births occurring in 44 delivering hospitals, the state's primary prenatal diagnosis clinic, and the state's only pediatric specialty hospital and associated clinics.