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# Cedars-Sinai, federal agency reach agreement on maternal care for patients of color



Cedars-Sinai Medical Center has reached an agreement with the government to resolve allegations that it violated federal laws against discrimination when treating pregnant Black, Latina and other patients of color. (Myung J. Chun / Los Angeles Times)

**By Emily Alpert Reyes**  
Staff Writer

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- A federal agency focused on civil rights announced Thursday that it had entered an agreement with Cedars-Sinai Medical Center to improve maternal care for Black, Latina and other patients of color.
- The agreement includes steps such as putting warning systems in place to ensure timely treatment of critical illness in pregnant patients, according to the Thursday announcement.

Cedars-Sinai Medical Center has reached an agreement with the government to resolve allegations that it violated federal laws against discrimination when treating pregnant Black, Latina and other patients of color, officials said Thursday.

The agreement with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office for Civil Rights comes two months after the agency [told Cedars-Sinai](#) its investigation “raises concerns that a lower standard of care is provided to Black patients compared to their white counterparts — especially leading up to and during obstetric hemorrhage.”

That November letter, however, said the agency hadn’t reached any final determination about whether Cedars-Sinai had violated federal statutes against discrimination.

In a statement Thursday, the HHS Office for Civil Rights said its review “did not determine any violation of federal law” by the medical center. An agency official said that meant it didn’t reach a conclusion.

Under the voluntary agreement, Cedars-Sinai will take steps aimed at improving outcomes for pregnant patients of color, including improving a reporting tool to document incidents of suspected bias, facilitating access to doulas during labor, and putting warning systems in place to ensure timely detection and treatment of critical illness in pregnant patients, according to the federal agency.

The Office for Civil Rights said it will monitor the resolution agreement for three years. If Cedars-Sinai fails to follow the agreement, the agency said it retains the right to continue its investigation.

The agency said that before its review, Cedars-Sinai “had undertaken substantial efforts to understand and mitigate the effects of discrimination and bias in healthcare,” including mandatory education for staff on unconscious bias.

Melanie Fontes Rainer, director of the office, called it a “first of its kind agreement” for HHS. “We think that the progress, the policies, the changes being made in this agreement are very advanced, in terms of what are the steps we need to take to ensure that Black and brown women are not dying disproportionately in hospitals or facing bias and discrimination in our hospital systems,” she said Thursday.

Cedars-Sinai chief health equity officer Dr. Christina Harris said in the statement issued by the federal agency that Cedars-Sinai embraces “the opportunity to partner with OCR to strengthen our longstanding commitment to equity for all those who entrust us with their care.”

The federal review was launched more than two and a half years ago, following a public outcry and lawsuits over the death of Kira Dixon Johnson, a Black woman who hemorrhaged and died after undergoing a cesarean section at Cedars-Sinai Medical Center in Los Angeles.

Her husband Charles Johnson reached settlements after suing Cedars-Sinai and physicians, but the widower has continued to press for change, founding the advocacy group 4Kira4Moms to prevent maternal deaths and spotlighting the [inequities facing Black women](#). In California, maternal mortality rates have been more than three times higher for Black patients than for white ones, [state data show](#).

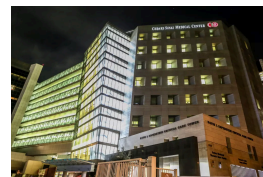
Earlier this week, Charles Johnson and other advocates had publicly called for Cedars-Sinai to acknowledge its “systemic failures in maternal healthcare and health equity,” to establish an independent oversight board to investigate racial disparities in care, and immediately suspend any clinicians who are implicated in discrimination or negligence, among other [demands](#).

If those demands were not met, Johnson said Tuesday that they planned to protest outside the hospital in February. “We are committed to continuing these protests until Cedars-Sinai steps up to the plate and does the right thing,” he said.

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Emily Alpert Reyes

Emily Alpert Reyes covers public health for the Los Angeles Times.

