

## **Study: 1 preemie's care costs as much as a dozen full-term babies'**

A new study puts the financial costs of premature birth into sharp perspective:

The money spent to care for one premature or low birth weight baby for one year -- nearly \$50,000 -- could cover the medical needs of nearly a dozen healthy, full-term babies, a study from the March of Dimes shows. Premature babies are those born before 37 weeks of pregnancy, while low birth weight babies weigh less than 5.5 pounds.

Doctors presented their findings at a meeting to discuss reducing the spiraling cost of health care.

"Preventing preterm birth is one way we can begin to rein in our nation's skyrocketing health care costs and help businesses protect their bottom line," said Jennifer Howse, president of the March of Dimes, in a statement. "The best prevention of prematurity is good maternity care."

Premature birth is a leading cause of infant mortality and costs the USA more than \$26 billion annually, according to the Institute of Medicine, which advises the government on health care. One out of every eight babies or nearly 543,000 a year are born prematurely each year, a rate that has risen more than 365 since the early 1980s.

Preemies spend more than 14 days in the hospital in their first year, compared to just over two days for full-term babies, the report shows.

Photo by Martin E. Klimek, for USA TODAY: A baby boy born about eight weeks early in the neonatal intensive care unit at Kaiser Permanente Medical Center in Santa Clara, Calif.