

# HealthySteps Advances Health Equity

By nearly every measure, children living in families with low incomes and children of color face the biggest obstacles, such as low birth weight, unstable housing, and limited access to early learning experiences. When we remove these barriers, greater access to opportunity and flourishing is possible for everyone.



## BRING HEALTHYSTEPS TO YOUR COMMUNITY

HealthySteps is committed to promoting the health, well-being, and school readiness of all babies and toddlers.

To learn more, contact HealthySteps National Director Dr. Rahil Briggs at [rbriggs@zerotothree.org](mailto:rbriggs@zerotothree.org). Visit [healthysteps.org/equity](https://healthysteps.org/equity).



HealthySteps is an evidence-based, team-based pediatric primary care model that promotes the health, well-being, and school readiness of babies and toddlers, particularly in areas where there are persistent inequities for families of color or with low incomes.

THE HEALTHYSTEPS NATIONAL NETWORK SPANS **20+ STATES, WASHINGTON, D.C., AND PUERTO RICO**



HEALTHYSTEPS IS CURRENTLY IN **180+ PEDIATRIC PRACTICES SUPPORTING 300,000+ CHILDREN**



## HEALTHYSTEPS MEETS FAMILIES WHERE THEY ARE WITH PEOPLE THEY TRUST

As many as 1 in 5 babies are born to families living below the poverty line; Hispanic and Black infants and toddlers are more than twice and three times, respectively, as likely to live in poverty as their White counterparts. The COVID-19 pandemic has further exposed and exacerbated these disparities and structural barriers, which have harmful and life-altering effects that begin even before birth and can last a lifetime. When we remove these barriers, greater access to opportunity and flourishing is possible for everyone.

That's where **ZERO TO THREE's** HealthySteps comes in. The innovative HealthySteps approach is based on the latest scientific understandings of how early childhood development works and how it might be best supported, so all babies and toddlers thrive.

HealthySteps provides early childhood developmental support to families where they are most likely to access it – the pediatric primary care office. HealthySteps pairs the expertise of a child development expert, the HealthySteps Specialist, and the pediatric primary care provider, to promote nurturing caregiving and successful foundations for young children.

Just at the time when the brain is developing most rapidly, HealthySteps brings focus to the important array of skills needed for families to foster healthy child development and life-long well-being, leading to improved outcomes, especially in areas where there have been persistent inequities for families of color or those with low incomes.

# HEALTHYSTEPS LEADS TO IMPROVED OUTCOMES IN AREAS WHERE THERE ARE PERSISTENT INEQUITIES FOR FAMILIES OF COLOR OR WITH LOW INCOMES.



## BREASTFEEDING

In addition to nutritional benefits, breastfeeding provides an opportunity for mother and infant to get in synch. It promotes cognitive development and social and emotional interactions. However, less than half of babies in families with low incomes were still breastfed at 6 months compared to 65% of babies in families above low income.

HealthySteps helps mothers find success with breastfeeding. HealthySteps mothers felt **significantly more supported to breastfeed** and had higher rates of continued breastfeeding (longer than 6 months).



## EARLY INTERVENTION

Early Intervention (EI) services work, but only when children are identified as early as possible and successfully connected to services. Without a clear referral and/or follow up protocol, many families cannot access the services they need.

HealthySteps helps connect all families to EI services, by understanding family concerns and ensuring that the systems of care are well coordinated and “talk to each other,” with the family at the center. One HealthySteps site in Washington, D.C. with a dedicated family services coordinator **quadrupled its EI successful referral rate**.



## MATERNAL DEPRESSION

Untreated maternal depression and anxiety affect parent-child attachment and the healthy development of young children. African American and Hispanic mothers have the highest rates of postpartum depression among all racial and ethnic groups, but are less likely to receive treatment, due to lower screening rates and less successful referrals.

HealthySteps ensures more frequent screenings, creates more opportunities for prevention, and supports treatment. Mothers with depressive symptoms reported **significantly fewer symptoms** after receiving HealthySteps and that **symptoms decreased at a faster rate** than comparable mothers.



## EARLY NUTRITION

Healthy early nutrition is foundational to long-term health and well-being. Data from the Women, Infants, and Children Program found that children ages 2-4 from families with low incomes have a 14.5% obesity prevalence rate, which significantly exceeds the national average of 8.9% for a similar age group.

HealthySteps provides age-appropriate nutritional guidance. Mothers were **significantly less likely to prematurely give newborns water or introduce cereal**. HealthySteps children “at risk” of social-emotional challenges had **significantly lower rates of obesity at age 5** than comparable children not participating in HealthySteps.



## SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Social-emotional development is a building block of mental health. Yet, people of color and those living at or below the federal poverty line have a disproportionately higher prevalence of adverse childhood experiences and mental health concerns.

HealthySteps strengthens early social and emotional development. Children whose mothers reported childhood trauma **scored better on a social-emotional screening** after receiving HealthySteps than comparable children.



## AUTISM SCREENING AND DIAGNOSIS

Early diagnosis and treatment leads to more positive outcomes later in life for people with autism. Yet, children of African American, Hispanic, and Asian descent, and children living in families with low incomes, are less likely to receive an early diagnosis of autism than White children despite similar prevalence of Autism Spectrum Disorders across racial/ethnic groups.

HealthySteps provides timely screenings and referrals for autism. Across a network of HealthySteps practices the **median age of autism diagnosis was two years earlier (2.2 years vs. 4.4 years) for children who screened at the high-risk level** than the national median.