



The HealthySteps approach is supported by a multi-site randomized controlled trial and subsequent site-level evaluations

Demonstrated positive outcomes for:



Children



Families



**Providers
and Practices**

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HealthySteps Improves the Lives of Young Children and Families

Based on the most recent scientific understandings of how early childhood development works

The early years are important to all of us – the capacities and skills developed during this critical period become the basis of a prosperous society. ZERO TO THREE's HealthySteps program is based on the most recent scientific understandings of early childhood development, and how it can best be supported to ensure individual, family, community, and societal well-being.

The innovative HealthySteps approach promotes nurturing caregiving, which supports families and improves the healthy development and well-being of babies and toddlers, preparing them for school and life.

We aim to achieve this goal by weaving together the expertise of a child development and behavioral health prevention and promotion expert, the HealthySteps Specialist, and the pediatric primary care provider. Together, at the time when the brain is developing most rapidly, these experts bring focus to the important skills needed for families to foster healthy child development and life-long well-being: social-emotional development, language and literacy skills, cognitive skills, and perceptual, motor, and physical development.



This icon signifies emerging evidence, which includes research that has not yet been published in a peer reviewed journal or presented at an academic/scientific conference.

Child Impacts



HealthySteps identifies whether children are reaching developmental milestones and addresses any challenges early by successfully connecting families and their children to the services they need.

SCREENING AND CONNECTION TO SERVICES

- During a one-year period, one HealthySteps site used quality improvement (QI) methodology and increased **social-emotional screening from 17% to 51%** and **two others increased developmental screening from 45% to 76% and from 10% to 78%**.^{1,2}



Among children with Medicaid, **receipt of any developmental screening was 1.4x higher** for HealthySteps children; **screening rates for Hispanic and Black HealthySteps children were 1.6 – 1.7x higher** than their counterparts.³

- HealthySteps children were **8x more likely to receive a developmental assessment** and had significantly **higher rates of developmental and other nonmedical referrals**.^{4,5,6}
- A network of three HealthySteps sites (two with dedicated community health workers) found nearly **90% of families were successfully connected with needed community services**.⁷
- One HealthySteps site with a dedicated family services coordinator **quadrupled its early intervention (EI) successful referral rate** after implementing HealthySteps.⁸



Among children with Medicaid, HealthySteps children had **higher rates EI service receipt** (14% vs. 9%) which also **held true for Hispanic HealthySteps children** compared with their counterparts (17% vs. 11%), suggesting HealthySteps may help mitigate disparities in accessing EI services.³



HealthySteps improves child health and well-being by supporting perceptual, motor and physical development, strengthening early social development, and promoting timely and continued care.

BREASTFEEDING AND AGE-APPROPRIATE EARLY NUTRITION

- HealthySteps mothers were significantly **less likely to prematurely give newborns water or introduce cereal**.⁴
- HealthySteps mothers felt significantly **more supported to breastfeed** and had **higher rates of continued breastfeeding** (longer than 6 months).^{9,10}
- HealthySteps children “at risk” of social-emotional challenges had significantly **lower rates of obesity at age 5** than comparable children not participating in HealthySteps.¹¹

¹ National rates of social-emotional screening are not available and rates of developmental screening – completed more often than social-emotional screening – remain low at 37%.

Child Impacts

- One HealthySteps site with integrated maternal mental health treatment demonstrated a **reversal of concerning infant weight loss**.¹²
- One HealthySteps site serving high proportions of children with Medicaid found a **lower prevalence of childhood obesity at age 3 compared to state-level rates**.¹

SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

- HealthySteps children whose mothers reported childhood trauma **scored better on a social-emotional screening** after receiving HealthySteps than comparable children.¹³



TIMELY AND CONTINUED CARE AND VACCINATIONS

- HealthySteps children were **more likely to attend all of the first 10 recommended well-child visits**, more likely to attend **six or more visits in the first 15 months of life** (a key indicator of quality careⁱⁱ), and were twice as likely to **attend specific visits**, and for **visits to be on time**.^{3,4,10,14,15,16}
- Three HealthySteps sites found a **reduced disparity between well-child visit attendance and insurance coverage**; attendance rates for sites serving high proportions of children with Medicaid were on par with rates for children with commercial insurance.¹
- 🔍 **Black and Hispanic** HealthySteps children with Medicaid **received more well-child visits and were more likely see the same provider** during a one-year period than their counterparts.³
- **Continuity of care with the same provider was significantly better** for HealthySteps children and families were **nearly twice as likely to remain with the practice** through 20 months.^{3,17,18}
- HealthySteps children were up to 1.6x **more likely to receive timely vaccinations** and 1.4x more likely to be **up to date on vaccinations by age 2**.^{4,10,13}

ⁱⁱ More than six well-child visits in the first 15 months of life is a key performance indicator from the [Healthcare Effectiveness Data and Informational Set](#).

Family Impacts



HealthySteps identifies family needs early and successfully connects families with services.

SCREENING AND CONNECTION TO SERVICES

- Two HealthySteps sites used QI methodology and **increased maternal depression screening** from 41% to 92% in just 19 weeks at one site and from 31% to 60% in just 11 weeks at the other.^{19,20,iii}
- **96% of HealthySteps mothers** in one site were **screened at least three times for maternal depression by six months postpartum** and had a significantly higher rate of screening than mothers not participating in HealthySteps.⁶
- HealthySteps mothers had significantly **higher rates of maternal depression referrals** and were **4x more likely to receive information on community resources**.⁴
- One HealthySteps site used QI methodology and **increased maternal depression referral follow-up** from 49% to 67%; another site reported a **70% follow-up visit rate** for mothers with maternal depression.^{17,21}



HealthySteps mothers with Medicaid had **higher rates of receipt of family planning services and postpartum care**.³



HealthySteps improves family health and supports a child's early learning and overall well-being.

MATERNAL DEPRESSION

- HealthySteps mothers were significantly **more likely to discuss their depressive symptoms** and pediatric providers were significantly more likely to discuss postpartum depression with mothers.^{4,10,13}
- Mothers with depressive symptoms **reported significantly fewer symptoms** after receiving HealthySteps and that **symptoms decreased at a faster rate** than comparable mothers.^{10,22}



ⁱⁱⁱ National rates of postpartum depression screening as reported as part of the NCOA Healthcare Effectiveness Data and Information Set are low—11% for private insurers and 17% for Medicaid.

Family Impacts

KNOWLEDGE OF INFANT DEVELOPMENT

- HealthySteps families received significantly **more anticipatory guidance on child development topics** and reported that the **guidance matched their needs**.^{13,17,23}
- HealthySteps families demonstrated a significantly **better understanding of infant development**.⁹
- HealthySteps families were significantly **more likely to notice behavioral cues and provide age-appropriate nurturing**.^{4,24}

EARLY RELATIONAL HEALTH

- HealthySteps families were significantly **less likely to report harsh punishment** (yelling, spanking with hand) and **severe discipline** (face slap, spanking with objects).^{4,10}
- Two HealthySteps sites found HealthySteps participation was significantly associated with **greater security of attachment and fewer child behavior problems**.²³

EARLY LITERACY AND SCHOOL READINESS

- HealthySteps families were significantly **more likely to share picture books and play with their infants daily**.⁴
- HealthySteps families were significantly **more likely to report their child looked at or read books weekly**.¹⁷
- HealthySteps families were significantly **more successful in establishing routines and limiting television time**.²⁵



CHILD SAFETY PRACTICES

- HealthySteps families were **24% less likely to place newborns on their stomachs to sleep**, reducing SIDS risk.⁴
- HealthySteps families **scored higher on an injury control index** and were significantly more likely to use stair gates and have access to a number for poison control.^{9,10}
- HealthySteps children were **23% less likely to visit the emergency room** for injuries in a 1-year period.⁴

Practice and Provider Impacts



HealthySteps helps pediatric primary care practices improve patient experience and provider satisfaction while lowering health care costs.

- HealthySteps families were significantly more likely to report **practice staff went out of the way for them**, that they **relied on practice staff for advice** (rather than a friend or relative) and that they **received needed emotional support**.^{4,23}
- HealthySteps families **rated their provider as more competent and caring** and were significantly more likely to believe that the **health plan cared** about them and to **recommend their clinic** to a friend or family member.^{9,23}
- Physicians reported significantly **higher satisfaction** with HealthySteps and that they **felt emotionally supported** by the HealthySteps Specialist.^{4,26}
- Physicians were over **5x more likely to be very satisfied with the ability of clinical staff to meet children's developmental and behavioral needs**.⁴
- One HealthySteps site used QI methodology and saw **improved use of tools to address childhood obesity** and significantly **increased follow-up visit attendance**.²⁷
- One HealthySteps site with integrated behavioral care found that **families received equitable advice regardless of race, ethnicity or language**, suggesting that HealthySteps can help mitigate existing disparities in the quality of pediatric primary care.²⁸
- One HealthySteps site serving a diverse pediatric population found that **estimated costs averted exceeded program operating costs** (\$641–\$959 compared to \$575 per child).²⁹



Endnotes

- ¹ Till, L., McCombs-Thornton, K. (2023, Sept 20 - 23) *Strengthening Infrastructure and Processes to Collect and Report Outcome Data: Lessons from Three Primary Care Clinics* [Conference Session]. ZERO TO THREE Annual Conference, Minneapolis, MN.
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- ³ Authorship TBD (under review). Using Medicaid claims to estimate the effect of HealthySteps on pediatric preventive services. Submitted to *JAMA Pediatrics* in June, 2024.
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Evidence Summary

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