



PEDIATRIC CARE • SUPPORTING • PARENTING
A Program of ZERO TO THREE

Well-Child Visit Adherence: HealthySteps Theory of Change

HealthySteps, a program of ZERO TO THREE, promotes improved outcomes for young children and families, in part by increasing adherence to well-child visits (WCVs). This document describes the importance of WCV adherence, disparities in WCV adherence, and how support to families can yield positive changes in a child's first three years and beyond. It includes a theory of change that illustrates the connection between HealthySteps services for Tier 3 families^a and potential improvements in WCV adherence.

Well-Child Visit Adherence at a Glance

WCVs are critical for children's health and development. WCVs allow health care providers to regularly monitor child health and development, identify and address concerns with caregivers, administer vaccines, and connect families to needed services.¹ Providers also share anticipatory guidance and preventive practices with caregivers during scheduled visits.² Attendance at WCVs is associated with lower rates of hospitalization and emergency department use.^{3,4} By contrast, missed WCVs are associated with later diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder.⁵

Although almost 90% of children attend WCVs⁶ and WCV adherence has increased nationally over time, disparities persist.⁷ Child and family characteristics associated with adherence include geographic location, family income, parent education, insurance status, and race and ethnicity.⁸⁻¹⁰ Children are more likely to miss WCVs if they live in rural areas,¹¹ have lower family incomes, have parents with lower education levels,¹² or are uninsured or publicly insured.^{13,14} For example, in 2020, only 52.9% of children with Medicaid received at least six WCVs with a pediatric primary care provider during their first 15 months of life, compared with 78.5% of children with private insurance.¹⁵ Additionally, although the Affordable Care Act expanded insurance coverage for all children, rates of WCV attendance remained lower among Latinx children than among White children.¹⁶



^a This document focuses on how HealthySteps can potentially influence well-child visit adherence for Tier 3 families; it does not address the potential influence on Tier 1 and Tier 2 families.

How HealthySteps Can Help

HealthySteps sites can help increase WCV adherence. Research suggests that the positive relationship between family members and their HealthySteps Specialist can help caregivers follow WCV schedules.^{17,18} While some barriers to attending WCVs are beyond the scope of HealthySteps, others may be addressed through HealthySteps services. HealthySteps team members administer screenings for family needs (e.g., maternal depression, transportation needs), which help identify families who may benefit from the extra support of a HealthySteps Specialist.

HealthySteps team members also provide tailored supports to families enrolled in Tier 3 services that may encourage WCV adherence. These supports include:



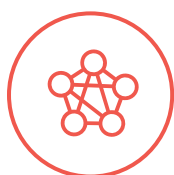
Ongoing, Preventive Team-Based Well-Child Visits—During visits, the HealthySteps Specialist develops rapport and builds a partnership with families. Engaging families as part of the team creates opportunities for enhanced monitoring and communication related to WCVs, particularly non-vaccine WCVs that may be attended at lower rates.



Child Development & Behavior Consults—The HealthySteps Specialist can offer family consults outside of WCVs to discuss a variety of developmental and/or child behavior issues and steps caregivers can take to address the concerns. These consults could include encouragement to attend WCVs for continued developmental monitoring.



Positive Parenting Guidance & Information—The HealthySteps Specialist can provide information and anticipatory guidance related to the importance of WCV adherence, including on-time immunizations and the tracking of child development.

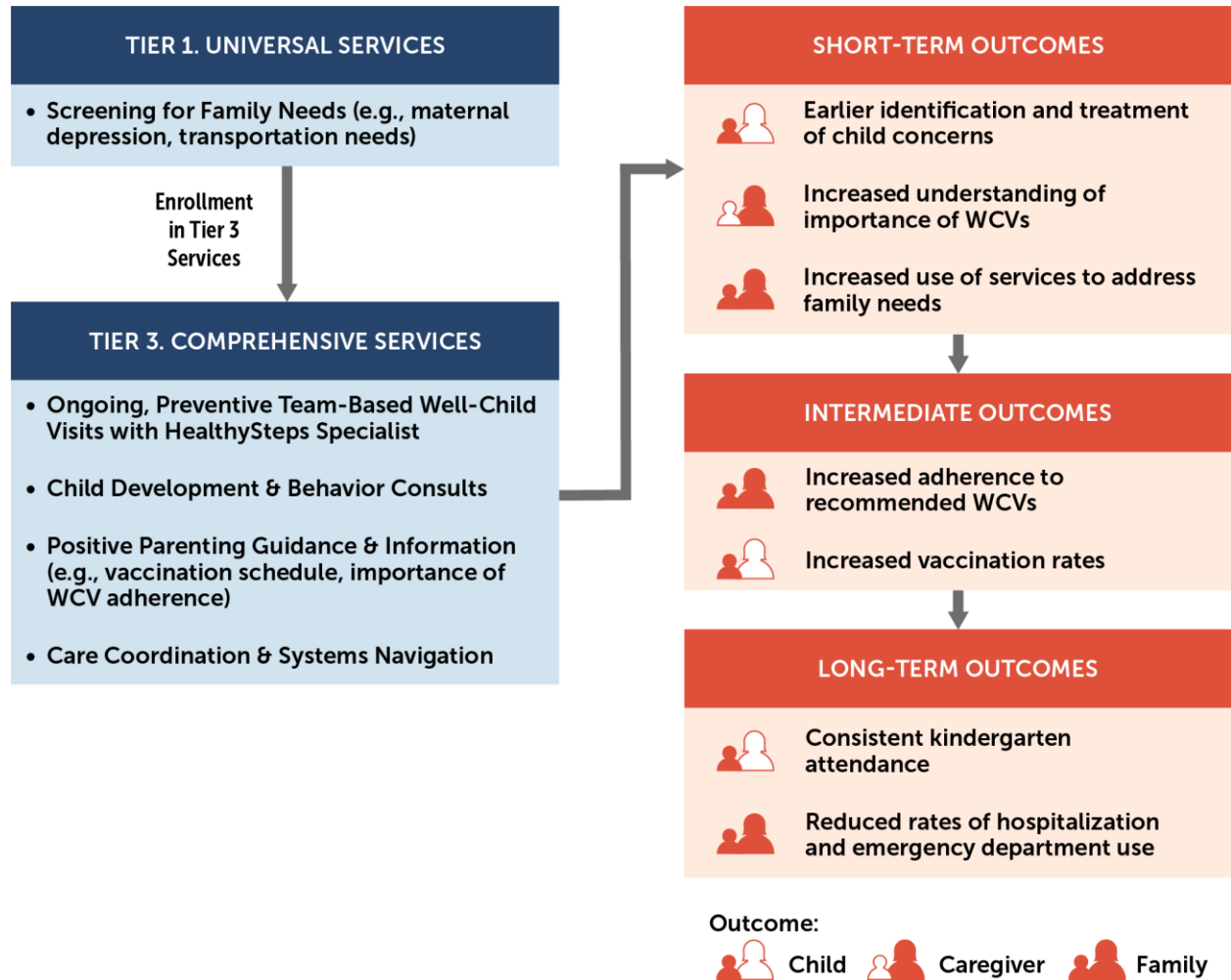


Care Coordination & Systems Navigation—The HealthySteps Specialist can organize and facilitate coordinated delivery of care across multiple providers, both in house and in the community. The HealthySteps Specialist can also follow up with families on the receipt of services and offer support if referral barriers occur. This coordination and support may increase the likelihood of attendance at later WCVs.

Theory of Change

The theory of change exhibit summarizes how HealthySteps can help increase WCV adherence by developing strong relationships with families and delivering tailored services and supports. It omits factors related to WCV attendance that HealthySteps cannot influence, such as socioeconomic status, insurance status, and geographic location. The exhibit also assumes that HealthySteps is implemented with fidelity to the model.

Exhibit 1. HealthySteps Well-Child Visit Adherence Theory of Change



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