



HealthySteps

HealthySteps integrates an early childhood specialist into every child's primary care team.

How it works

Because most young children visit the pediatrician, well-child visits present an important opportunity to ensure that families are equipped to address children's needs. A pediatric primary care specialist participating in regular well visits can help families during and between well-child care to address concerns that physicians often lack time to address, such as feeding, behavior, sleep, attachment, and socioeconomic risk factors to health. At the same pediatric visit, mothers experiencing postpartum anxiety or depression can also receive support.

Why it matters

Parents often have questions and concerns about developmental milestones, behavior and discipline, and breastfeeding and nutrition that aren't always addressed at pediatric well child visits. Without prior knowledge of early childhood development, parents may not know what to ask or even that they can ask for help with issues that aren't strictly medical. They may worry that additional help may be unaffordable. Guidance and support from an early childhood specialist can improve children's health, safety, and socioemotional development, as well as provide early intervention that can be life changing and cost saving for families.

HealthySteps has demonstrated positive social-emotional results for participating children whose mothers experienced childhood trauma, compared with children who did not take part in the program.

Studies show that HealthySteps may yield positive outcomes in:¹

- Child social-emotional development
- Duration of breastfeeding
- Reducing postpartum depression
- Key social determinants of health (food insecurity, housing instability or homelessness, utility needs, transportation needs, interpersonal safety, substance misuse, tobacco use)
- Parent-child relationships
- Greater adherence to well-child visits and continuity of preventive care
- Vaccination rates
- Use of positive parenting approaches
- Child safety practices
- Decreased use of harsh and severe discipline
- Parental satisfaction with care



Key facts

The program supports families at pediatric well visits by funding early childhood specialists.

They work in pediatric primary care practices that serve babies to provide screenings, resources, and coaching.

The specialist also helps parents deal with children's behavioral and developmental challenges and coordinate and manage specialty care when needed.

2,000

One full-time HealthySteps early childhood specialist can provide screenings for to up 2,000 children annually.



HealthySteps (cont'd)

About Under 3 DC

Under 3 DC is a broad-based coalition of parents with young children, early childhood educators, advocates, community-based organizations, and health professionals who believe every child deserves a strong start and a limitless future. Our work centers on the people experiencing racial and economic injustice every day. It shines a spotlight on the need for more public investments to support families with infants and toddlers. Together, we can set the city on a path to creating and sustaining a high-quality, equitable early childhood system.

Under3DC.org

Join the conversation

    Under3DC

Fully funding HealthySteps is key to addressing issues that prove costly to families and the health care system over time. More importantly, this kind of accessible, expert, and comprehensive care improves the lifelong health and well-being of children and families, preventing significant health, social-emotional, academic, and behavioral problems down the road, promoting a brighter future for DC's kids.

Who it helps

The District of Columbia is home to 26,286 infants and toddlers, many of whom live in households with low-wage earners.² To best serve children and the communities in which they live, HealthySteps clinicians are embedded in pediatric primary care practices where the majority of current patients are enrolled in Medicaid, DC Healthy Families, or do not have insurance, as these are the eligibility categories for HealthySteps screenings and consultations.

Funding one full-time early childhood specialist enables a pediatric practice to provide HealthySteps' required universal screenings to up to 2,000 children annually. From that population of 2,000 families screened, HealthySteps specialists can provide short-term child development and behavior consults to up to 300 children annually and comprehensive services (i.e., ongoing, preventive, team-based, well-child visits) to an additional 300 children annually.

What's next

Providing this kind of critical support to families with young children requires funding for specialists' training and compensation. Implementation of this component of Birth To-Three for All DC requires new allocations each year of \$300,000 in local funding from FY 2019-2023 until DC Health is funding HealthySteps programs at **at least five pediatric primary care clinics** throughout Wards 5, 7, and 8.³ Funding of \$300,000 supports two care coordinator specialists and covers administrative expenses at each site each year. Once fully phased in, HealthySteps will require \$1.5 million in ongoing annual investments.⁴ The 2022 fiscal year DC budget provides \$1,050,000⁵ to support four existing Healthy Steps sites administered by Children's National and Unity Healthcare. Included in the FY22 budget is \$300,000 in new funds to support the expansion of Healthy Steps to a new site in FY22.

² DC Kids Count. DC Action. 2019.

³ D.C. Law 22-179. Birth-to-Three for All DC Amendment Act of 2018. <https://code.dccouncil.us/dc/council/laws/22-179.html>

⁴ D.C. Law 22-179. Birth-to-Three for All DC Fiscal Impact Statement. 2019. http://app.cfo.dc.gov/services/fiscal_impact/pdf/spring09/FIS%2022-203%20Birth-to-Three%20for%20All%20DC%20Act%20of%202018%20Enrolled.pdf

⁵ Office of Chief Financial Officer. 2022 HCO Department of Health. Chapter Budget Book. 2021. https://cfo.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/cfo/publication/attachments/hc_doh_chapter_2022s.pdf