

# Help Me Grow

Help Me Grow connects expecting parents and families to resources they need to encourage positive maternal and child health. Help Me Grow helps families locate services such as prenatal and child developmental screenings and links families to community-based support services.

## How it works

The law requires DC Health to establish a data system to track child health and well-being data, such as developmental screening results and referrals. This would make it easier for public officials to identify programmatic gaps, improve systems, and connect more families to quality services. DC Health must provide developmental screening training for pediatricians and other health care providers as well.

## Why it matters

DC offers many child and family-focused resources, but it's not always easy for families to learn about or connect with these vital services. Help Me Grow helps reduce this burden by connecting expectant mothers, children, and their families to a network of community based supports.

Early and regular prenatal care is vital to the safety and health of the baby and parents during and immediately after pregnancy. During prenatal visits, doctors monitor the growth of unborn babies to detect potential pregnancy-related complications early. Yet, too many expectant parents in DC struggle to access quality care that could help make a difference in their health and the health of their children. Maternal mortality in DC is higher than the national average, with Black women in the city dying at nearly twice this rate. Expanding Help Me Grow could help reduce this and other adverse pregnancy outcomes by connecting more pregnant mothers to prenatal care.

Child development services — such as screenings and care coordination — help infants and young children develop and grow up healthy. Unfortunately, only one in three DC children ages 0 to 5 receive developmental screenings during primary care visits. Greater access to these services is critical, given that nearly one-third of children ages 4 months to 5 years old in DC are at risk of developmental delays. With full funding, Help Me Grow would help more children receive screenings, allowing more families and health providers to detect and address early signs of developmental delays or disabilities. This would enable more positive future health and academic outcomes.

Help Me Grow also supports expectant parents and children by connecting families with home visiting programs. When working with families, care coordinators can provide information on and referrals to programs that help strengthen the overall health and wellbeing of families.

## Key facts

The Birth-to-Three Act expands Help Me Grow to include a confidential referral helpline, through which families connect with care coordinators who provide resources and referrals to health professionals and service providers throughout the District.

As a part of this expansion, Help Me Grow must also maintain an up-to-date directory of available public and private programs and services. DC Health oversees this program.

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All 44,000 DC children under age 5, and their families stand to benefit from a full expansion of Help Me Grow.<sup>1</sup>



## Help Me Grow (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](https://Under3DC.org)

### Join the conversation

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### Who it helps

Expecting parents and families with children ages 0 to 5 living in DC are eligible for services. The Birth-to-Three Act aims to expand Help Me Grow by the 2022 fiscal year. The Birth-to-Three Act requires an annual report going forward that will make this information public. However, all expecting parents, the 44,000 children under age 5, and their families who live in the District, could benefit from full expansion. Healthcare and community-based service providers who play a central role in the Help Me Grow network would also benefit.

### What's next

In 2021, Help Me Grow has served 213 families and completed almost 300 resource referrals using its online database to pair families to available services throughout the District. To date, the unique identifier component, as required in the Birth-to-Three Law, has not been created and more information is needed to identify the full amount to develop that technology for the program. The 2022 fiscal year DC budget provides \$581,000<sup>2</sup> in new funds to carry out improvements to Help Me Grow. The coalition remains engaged with agency partners to support the growth and success of the program for District families.

<sup>2</sup> Office of Chief Financial Officer, 2022 HCO Department of Health Chapter Budget Book, 2021. [https://cfo.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/ocfo/publication/attachments/hc\\_doh\\_chapter\\_2022s.pdf](https://cfo.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/ocfo/publication/attachments/hc_doh_chapter_2022s.pdf)