



# HealthySteps

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

## Key facts

The program supports families at pediatric well visits by integrating HealthySteps specialists into the primary care setting. HealthySteps specialists are child development and behavioral health promotion and prevention experts that serve children ages 0-3 and their families.

Specialists ensure children meet certain criteria by providing screenings, resources, and coaching.

The specialists also help parents and caregivers to understand children's behavioral and developmental challenges and to coordinate and manage specialty care when needed.

# 300+

In fiscal year 2022, over 300 new patients were served through locally funded HealthySteps sites.

## How it works

Because most young children visit the pediatrician, child wellness visits are an important opportunity to connect with families and ensure that they have the appropriate resources to address their child's needs. Physicians, however, may not always have the time or ability to address all concerns that families have. A HealthySteps specialist that participates in regular wellness visits can help families during and between these visits to address concerns outside the physician's capabilities, such as feeding, behavior, sleep, and attachment. Parents can also receive support for themselves, including help addressing postpartum anxiety and depression.

## Why it matters

Parents often have questions and concerns about developmental milestones, behavior, discipline, breastfeeding, and nutrition that aren't always addressed during a visit to the pediatrician. 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 social-emotional development, as well as provide early intervention that can be life-changing and allow for cost savings for families.

HealthySteps has demonstrated positive social-emotional results for participating children whose mothers experienced childhood trauma, compared to children who did not participate in the program.<sup>1</sup>

Studies show that HealthySteps may yield positive outcomes in:<sup>2</sup>

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



## HealthySteps

### Learn more

Let's make the District of Columbia a city where equitable opportunities begin at birth. Find out how to take action for our youngest residents and their families.

[Under3DC.org](https://www.under3dc.org)

### Join the conversation

  [Under3DC](#)

Full, sustainable funding for HealthySteps is key to ensuring this program can continue to address issues that prove costly to families and the health care system over time. More importantly, the accessible, expert, and comprehensive care provided by HealthySteps improves the lifelong health and well-being of children and families, preventing significant health, social-emotional, academic, and behavioral problems down the road, and promotes a brighter future for DC's kids.

### Who HealthySteps helps

HealthySteps specialists are primarily embedded in pediatric primary care practices where the majority of current patients are enrolled in Medicaid.<sup>3</sup> Across the District, there are ten HealthySteps sites in wards 1, 3, 4, 7, and 8. Of these ten sites, six are locally funded by DC Health and four are privately funded. The six locally funded sites are in wards 7 and 8 at Children's National Hospital, Unity Health Care, and MedStar Georgetown. In FY22, Children's National Hospital served 777 residents (356 were newly enrolled) and Unity Health Care served 336 residents.<sup>4</sup>

### What's next

Providing this kind of critical support to families with young children requires funding for specialists' training and compensation. DC Health funds five Federally Qualified Health Centers in wards 5, 7, and 8 that utilize the HealthySteps model.<sup>5</sup> Once fully phased in, HealthySteps will require \$1.5 million in ongoing annual investments.<sup>6</sup> The 2024 fiscal year DC budget provides \$1.35 million for the six locally funded HealthySteps sites mentioned above.<sup>7</sup> Importantly, the FY24 budget maintained funding for six locally funded sites and provided the sites the opportunity to continue expansion. FY24 will be the first full fiscal year for the sixth and newest locally funded HealthySteps site with MedStar Georgetown.

<sup>1</sup> Valado, Trenna, Tracey, Jennifer, Goldfinger, Jonathan & Briggs, Rahil (2019). [HealthySteps Evaluation: Transforming the Promise of Pediatric Care. ZERO TO THREE, HealthySteps, Center for Youth Wellness.](#)

<sup>2</sup> Jones, Damon E., Greenberg, Mark & Crowley, Max. (2015). [Early Social-Emotional Functioning and Public Health: The Relationship Between Kindergarten Social Competence and Future Wellness. American Journal of Public Health.](#)

<sup>3</sup> [D.C. Law 22-179. Birth-to-Three for All DC Amendment Act of 2018.](#)

<sup>4</sup> DC Council Committee on Health, Department of Health. (FY2022). [Performance Oversight Hearing Questions.](#)

<sup>5</sup> DC Council Committee on Health, Department of Health. (FY2022). [Performance Oversight Hearing Questions.](#)

<sup>6</sup> [D.C. Law 22-179. Birth-to-Three for All DC. Fiscal Impact Statement. 2018.](#)

<sup>7</sup> DC Council Committee on Health, Department of Health. (FY2024). [Budget Oversight Pre-Hearing Questions.](#)

#### About Under 3 DC

Under 3 DC, a broad based coalition in the District of Columbia, harnesses the voices and power of parents with young children, early educators, advocates, and health professionals to create transformative social change. The Coalition's efforts center 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.