



Smart Start Network Position on Newborn and Family Home Visiting Programs

The addition of a new baby to a family is a joyous occasion that brings new and exciting experiences and challenges for families. New parents who receive quality care, health information, and support are more likely to experience a healthy, positive transition to parenthood, which has a direct effect on the health and development of their newborn. Given the infant and maternal health crisis in North Carolina, the NC Partnership for Children (NCPC) and the Smart Start Network are committed to strengthening and expanding newborn and family home* visiting programs as well as parent education and family support for each family, in every community in North Carolina.

The Challenge

North Carolina has a long history of supporting young children and their families to build the foundation for life-long health, well-being, and learning. However, current [data](#) about North Carolina's young children and families show that many families face significant barriers to achieving health and well-being. One in five young children in North Carolina live in families experiencing poverty and many report they do not live in a supportive neighborhood where they know how to get help or where families help each other out. Additionally, one-third of mothers in North Carolina report challenges with their physical and mental health. For some families, the situation is a crisis. According to a Spring 2023 report [Progress and Opportunities: Maternal and Child Health in North Carolina](#):

- North Carolina has the 8th highest infant and maternal mortality rate in the country.
- Black women are 4 times more likely to lose a child before their 1st birthday and 2.9 times more likely to die while pregnant or within a year of childbirth compared to white women.

A Response

“Each Child, Every Community” is the priority of the Smart Start Network and the 75 local partnerships serving all North Carolina counties. Through collaboration in local communities, Smart Start local partnerships work to increase access and raise the quality of early care and education, provide family-focused support programs and advance child and family health.

Research on brain development has shown that newborns who experience a positive and supportive relationship with their caregivers grow up with healthy brains and bodies that promote lifelong learning and wellbeing. Many Smart Start Local Partnerships provide family-focused programs for newborns and their families, including home visiting and parent education based on unique community needs, helping newborns and their families survive and thrive.

**newborn family visiting may happen in the home or outside the home*

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The North Carolina Partnership for Children and the Smart Start Network supports universal newborn and family home visiting and parent education programs for each family in every community in North Carolina. "Universal" refers to a program or service without eligibility requirements and therefore offered to all families.

Newborn and family home visiting programs involve trained professionals such as health workers, nurses, social workers, or other community workers that visit families with newborn babies. These intimate relationships provide the opportunity for support, education, and connection to resources from a trusted source. Studies have shown this approach to family support will contribute to improved infant and maternal health outcomes.

We endorse these foundational principles for universal newborn and family home visiting programs.

Whole Family Well-Being

Newborn and family home visiting programs focus on infant and family well-being by including a comprehensive assessment of a newborn and their caregiver's health and well-being. Programs engage families as equal and trusted partners with a strengths-based and culturally responsive focus to emphasize family opportunities, hopes, and solutions to help create a safe, nurturing environment for the baby and their family.

Local Coordination and Implementation

Newborn and family home visiting programs are tailored to meet the unique needs of families in each community and align with available local resources and support systems. Programs should be culturally responsive, and community guided throughout their development, implementation, and evaluation.

Community Connection and Referrals

Newborn and family home visiting programs ensure connections to resources and support for families and identify and fill gaps in services in communities. Families with newborns often need access to tangible resources to keep their babies healthy and safe. New parents and caregivers also need social support for their emotional well-being.

Home Visiting and Parent Education Continuum

Newborn and family home visiting and parent education programs are part of a tapestry of services in a community and serve as a valuable tool to help identify if a child or family may need additional resources. Offering these universal programs to families with newborns often increases referrals to more intensive and targeted home visiting and parent education programs in a community, leading to a continuum of care.

Conclusion

The time to act is now. As North Carolina makes investments and builds programs to improve infant and maternal health, the Smart Start Network stands ready with the commitment, experience, and capacity to convene and support implementation in every community in the state.