

I am Elizabeth Frenette, a Senior Health Policy Expert at HealthySteps, a program of the early childhood organization, ZERO TO THREE. Children and families are experiencing serious challenges including developmental and early learning delays, behavioral concerns, postpartum depression, and other family stressors – all factors that have enormous impacts on child health and development. ZERO TO THREE’s evidence-based HealthySteps program provides early childhood development support to families where they are most likely to access it – the pediatric primary care office.

The HealthySteps Specialist, a child development and behavioral health promotion and prevention expert, joins the pediatric primary care team to promote nurturing parenting, which improves babies’ and toddlers’ healthy development and well-being. HealthySteps uses a two-generation population health approach to promote well-being and address both common and complex concerns related to behavior, development, caregiver mental health, and/or family needs such as food security and housing stability. HealthySteps identifies and mitigates challenges early, so that young children have a strong foundation for a lifetime of healthy development, learning, and growth. The evidence-based model is organized into three Tiers of Service and eight Core Components to make sure all families in the practice with children ages 0-3 receive support aligned with their needs. Together with cutting-edge pediatric primary care practices, we prepare young children for school & life.

HealthySteps provides services in 107 pediatric primary care settings across New York, reaching ~140,000 children and families. [Find a HealthySteps site near you.](#)

In part through initial start-up funding from the New York State Office of Mental Health (OMH), many New York families have access to HealthySteps, but Medicaid funding is needed to create a sustainable enhanced payment model to continue delivery of these services to children and their caregivers, in pediatric primary care, aligned with the recent [EPSDT State Health Official letter](#).

Medicaid funding will help solidify OMH’s significant, multi-year [state investments](#) in HealthySteps and help to ensure New York’s babies, young children, and their families have access to supports and services they need for years to come. Increasingly, states and the Federal Government are investing in models like HealthySteps as part of population health efforts to help address the needs of young children and their families and help close equity gaps (e.g., [California](#), [Maryland](#), [Massachusetts](#), and [New Jersey](#)).

Recommendation

To better support New York’s babies and toddlers, we urge the State to allocate \$4.7 million in the first year and \$8.5 million annually thereafter in Medicaid funds to create an enhanced payment for HealthySteps to sustain long-term access to integrated pediatric primary care. These funds will then be eligible for a 50% federal match for request totals of up to \$9.4 million in the first year and \$17 million annually thereafter.

"If I didn't have [HealthySteps], I don't think I would have been able to manage my mental health and for me to even press on to be the mother that I am today."

"If every mom, every family had this opportunity, I really believe that depression will go down with the mothers and the family, because most of us feel like we don't have anybody to turn to. We don't have that help."

– Teresa Cox-Bates

- [How to break the cycle of childhood trauma? Help a baby's parents](#), Rhitu Chatterjee, NPR

To adequately reimburse providers for the dyadic services delivered as part of integrated primary care program for young children, we recommend ***New York Medicaid implement the following innovative payment model.***

New York Medicaid should require Medicaid Managed Care Organizations to provide an enhanced payment of \$25 for well-child and sick visit claims submitted for children ages 0 through 3 at HealthySteps sites, including Federally Qualified Health Centers, who show proof they are meeting or are on track to meet HealthySteps model fidelity. This approach is consistent with a payment model developed by the state of Maryland, which was implemented in January 2023 and [New Jersey](#), where implementation is currently being finalized.

New York has demonstrated support for HealthySteps through its initial multi-year [state investments](#), and **this proposed dedicated funding stream will help solidify these investments to ensure New York’s babies, young children, and their families have access to preventive supports and services they need for years to come.** With increased access to HealthySteps, New York will see [improved outcomes for young children and their caregivers](#). Sustaining HealthySteps also supports New York’s larger budgetary goals in long-term cross sector cost savings while improving young children’s developmental trajectories. New York specific HealthySteps cost savings estimates are available, upon request.

Thank you again for this opportunity to testify and I look forward to future conversations on ways to make New York the safest and most equitable place in the nation to deliver and raise a baby.

HealthySteps Success in New York

Sarah*, a single mother, came into the pediatrician’s and shared that she was experiencing domestic violence and challenges with food, clothing, and housing. She also opened up about her fear and uncertainty of how to navigate systems to address those challenges. To support Sarah, her HealthySteps Specialist collaborated with the team’s community health worker (CHW) on a comprehensive, compassionate, and trauma-informed approach—using active listening, empathy, validation and emphasizing the confidentiality of their conversations.

Together, the HealthySteps Specialist, CHW, and Sarah created a safety plan. However, when they called the local domestic violence center, they were full and told her to call DHS. Sarah was becoming overwhelmed, so the CHW sat with her to make the many calls needed to get her immediate, safe housing. That very day, the CHW helped Sarah get transportation to her safe housing and gather necessary supplies, including food and clothing for the family. Over the next few days, the CHW connected Sarah with another local domestic violence agency that was able to provide legal guidance for her to obtain a restraining order and secure sole custody of her children.

Now, Sarah is thriving and enrolled in a medical coding class that will allow her to work from home, which was a goal of hers. She is connected with therapy, and she is feeling hopeful and excited about her and her children’s future.

**Name has been changed to protect anonymity.*

For more information, please contact Elizabeth Frenette, HealthySteps Senior Health Policy Expert, at efrenette@zerotothree.org.