



ICYMI: DCF Releases Request for Proposals for Universal Home Visiting Initiative to Help Improve Maternal and Infant Health, Overall Family Wellness

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NJ Leads the Nation by Advancing This Game-Changing Initiative, Set to Launch at Initial Locations Around the State in January 2024

TRENTON, NJ – In another significant step designed to bring New Jersey closer to implementing Universal Newborn Home Visiting, the Department of Children and Families (DCF) recently issued a request for proposals to engage partner-agencies. This life-changing model of family support is demonstrated to improve maternal and infant health outcomes and the family's overall sense of wellness and wellbeing, and represents a key component of First Lady Tammy Murphy's ongoing Nurture NJ initiative.

"As a mother of four, I remember clearly the precarious and challenging first few weeks after bringing home a new baby. Now, I also understand just how dangerous and life-threatening that time can be for new mothers. The Universal Home Visiting program is an essential tool to catch any complications of labor and delivery as early as possible, save lives, and support every mother and family during the critical first few weeks with their baby," said **First Lady Tammy Murphy**. "I am incredibly proud that we are taking yet another step towards the official launch of this game-changing initiative, which is one of the many recommendations in our Nurture NJ Maternal and Infant Health Strategic Plan, and will advance our mission of making New Jersey the safest most equitable state in the nation to deliver and raise a baby."

"The days after bringing home a newborn can be stressful, and new parents – or even experienced ones – may have questions, or require assistance," said **NJ DCF Commissioner Christine Norbut Beyer**. "Universal Home Visiting will provide the option for a family to request a nurse visit in the home at a crucial time for the family, making sure mother and baby have received appropriate health check-ups and screenings, and referrals to additional services as necessary. Through this model, we can help all families have the strong start they need to thrive."

In July 2021, Governor Murphy signed legislation to create a statewide, universal home visiting (UHV) program for newborns, making New Jersey the second state in the nation to advance UHV for families who have experienced the joy of childbirth, or who are welcoming a newborn into their home through adoption or foster care placement. The law also makes New Jersey the first state to offer a nurse home visit to families who have experienced the tragedy of stillbirth.

Since 2021, DCF has been developing the infrastructure, policies, and supports to ensure the program would have a successful launch in New Jersey. This request for proposals is an important step toward beginning nurse home visits that will phase in statewide over several years, with the first five counties – Cumberland, Gloucester, Mercer, Middlesex, and Essex – set to go live in January 2024.

The RFP is seeking UHV providers who will be responsible for maintaining a team of registered nurses (RNs) and support staff to provide services to families in the regions where the program will initially be implemented.

Under the program, within weeks following the birth of a child, adoption, or resource home placement, a registered or advanced practice nurse (APN) will schedule a visit with the family, at no out-of-pocket cost to the family. In addition, nurses providing the service are connected to "community alignment" networks, which help nurses to learn about and connect families to programs and supports available in their communities. The program is entirely voluntary for families to participate in and is open to all New Jersey families welcoming a new baby without any eligibility restrictions. Families will be eligible for up to three visits depending on their needs.

During the initial visit, the nurse will perform basic health and developmental health screenings for mothers and their babies, provide postpartum education, answer any questions that the new parents may have, and help families to connect to local programs or services that they may be interested in.

"As a mom myself, I recall well the days and weeks after each of my children were born," said **Katherine Stoehr, First Deputy Commissioner at DCF**. "Like every parent, my husband and I had so many questions and were adjusting to new routines. Our hope at DCF is that New Jersey's families will take full advantage of this program, which is a substantial addition to public policies that make New Jersey an incredible place to raise a family."

New Jersey selected the evidence-based Family Connects model for Universal Home Visiting which has already been adopted in local communities across 19 states and statewide in Oregon. Family Connects is currently being piloted in Mercer County.

Two randomized control trials were conducted of the Durham, North Carolina Family Connects model. Researchers found that, for families who were connected to the Durham home visiting program:

- Mothers were 30% less likely to experience possible postpartum depression or anxiety and were more likely to attend their 6-week postpartum health check.
- The family's community connections increased by 13%, and family homes had more learning material to support infant development.
- Emergency room visits and hospital overnight stays were reduced by 50% in the first year of life.
- Families had 44% lower rates of child protective services investigations through the child's second birthday, and 39% lower investigation rates through the child's fifth birthday.

"Everywhere that it's been implemented, the Universal Home Visiting model simply works, and results in better outcomes for mothers, infants, and whole families," said **Sanford Starr, Assistant Commissioner for DCF's Division of Family and Community Partnerships, which is taking the lead on implementing UHV**. "In New Jersey, we've been working with a cross-disciplinary group of stakeholders to ensure that we get the most out of our model implementation, and we're looking forward to getting this ground-breaking, proven prevention strategy off the ground, to positively affect the trajectory of all families in New Jersey."

To date, DCF has created a statewide network of FCI community alignment specialists, located in Connecting NJ hubs. The department has also engaged Johns Hopkins University to evaluate the program, and developed a training and implementation plan with Family Connects International. Through the generosity of the Burke Foundation, DCF received an in-depth analysis of the nurse home visiting labor force, positioning the state to responsibly create the program in the midst of a national and state-wide nursing shortage, and market research to engage directly with parents and caregivers throughout the state regarding their perceptions of home visiting and what would help encourage them to participate in the program.

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