

Governor Phil Murphy

# First Lady Tammy Murphy, DCF Commissioner Beyer, State Legislators and Others Join Together to Celebrate Launch of Family Connects NJ

01/23/2024

*Program Provides Universal Home Visitation to Mothers and Babies Starting in Cumberland, Gloucester, Middlesex, Mercer, and Essex*

**TRENTON** – First Lady Tammy Murphy today hosted a roundtable discussion to celebrate Maternal Health Awareness Day. During the discussion, the First Lady, Department of Children and Families Commissioner Christine Norbut Beyer, Senate Majority Leader M. Teresa Ruiz, Assemblywoman Shanique Speight, and others discussed the importance of the recently launched Family Connects NJ program. Family Connects NJ is a new state program offering a free, voluntary, in-home visit by a specially trained nurse to support all families and their newborns within two weeks after delivery.

In July 2021, Governor Murphy signed legislation to create a statewide, universal home visitation program for newborns, making New Jersey the second, but by far the largest and most diverse, state in the nation to legislate such a program for families. New Jersey's program is the largest and most robust program in the country, supporting not just birthing families but adoptive and resource parents as well as those who have experienced the tragedy of a stillbirth.

Because more than 50 percent of maternal mortalities occur after childbirth, and in an effort to catch complications as early as possible, Family Connects NJ includes basic health and developmental screenings for mothers and their babies, postpartum education, feeding and sleeping tips and much more. Families may also be connected to community programs and supports such as WIC, community doulas, food assistance programs, and more.

"The weeks following delivery are some of the most crucial moments for mothers and babies," **said First Lady Tammy Murphy.** "Inspired and informed by the lived experiences of mothers themselves, Family Connects NJ ensures New Jersey families receive the critical support they need to prevent complications during that tenuous and sensitive time. As we recognize Maternal Health Awareness Day, we reflect on the significant progress we have made over the past year toward becoming the gold standard of maternal and infant health care, including ensuring mothers have access to a doula before, during and after labor and delivery; establishing the Maternal and Infant Health and Innovation Authority in Trenton; and now officially launching Family Connects NJ, a universal home visitation program. I am proud to see New Jersey moving determinedly in the right direction when it comes to maternal and infant health, which would not have been possible without the support of our thousands of partners."

First Lady Tammy Murphy launched Nurture NJ in 2019 as a statewide program committed to reducing the maternal mortality rates in New Jersey and ensuring equitable care among women and children of all races and ethnicities. In January 2021, the First Lady unveiled the Nurture NJ Maternal and Infant Health Strategic Plan, a blueprint to reduce New Jersey's maternal mortality rate by 50 percent over five years and eliminate racial disparities in birth outcomes.



Family Connects NJ (FCNJ) addresses two critical recommendations in the [Nurture NJ Maternal and Infant Health Strategic Plan](https://urldefense.com/v3/https://t.e2ma.net/click/37cgyk/nrddit/n7doj7_!!J30X0ZrnC1oQtbA!Yv-fCxYNNMM9zU9Pc1vJGNbeUFz6lmOVH0tjVq-MMcM4pw2yYEaFh2Wkbg2_P0Ca3A9exoeKB3mhKrga91z0y18lJnjH$) ([https://urldefense.com/v3/https://t.e2ma.net/click/37cgyk/nrddit/n7doj7\\_!!J30X0ZrnC1oQtbA!Yv-fCxYNNMM9zU9Pc1vJGNbeUFz6lmOVH0tjVq-MMcM4pw2yYEaFh2Wkbg2\\_P0Ca3A9exoeKB3mhKrga91z0y18lJnjH\\$](https://urldefense.com/v3/https://t.e2ma.net/click/37cgyk/nrddit/n7doj7_!!J30X0ZrnC1oQtbA!Yv-fCxYNNMM9zU9Pc1vJGNbeUFz6lmOVH0tjVq-MMcM4pw2yYEaFh2Wkbg2_P0Ca3A9exoeKB3mhKrga91z0y18lJnjH$)):

- **Recommendation 5.19:** The Department of Children and Families should continue to expand and universally offer evidence-based home visiting programs with focus on those models proven to reduce maternal and infant mortality.
- **Recommendation 7.16:** State departments and agencies and health care providers should incorporate community-based perinatal health workers in an interdisciplinary care approach to support pregnant women and caregivers into the postnatal period.

FCNJ, which is being implemented through a phased in approach, launched in five counties—Cumberland, Gloucester, Mercer, Middlesex, and Essex, on January 15, 2024. The goal is to continue to expand the program to additional counties over the next few years until it is fully implemented statewide.

The program’s specialized nurse visits are open to all families that are welcoming a newborn through childbirth, or those growing their families through adoption or as a resource parent or kinship caregiver. Nurse visits are also available for families experiencing the tragedy of a stillbirth or loss of a newborn.

The free nurse visits are available to all families, regardless of income, insurance coverage, or immigration status.

The New Jersey Department of Children and Families’ Division of Family and Community Partnerships (FCP), is the state entity tasked with implementing and promoting the state’s universal home visitation program.

“It’s such an emotional and exciting time when you first bring your newborn home, but it can also be quite chaotic and overwhelming,” **said NJ DCF Commissioner Christine Norbut Beyer**. “To have a specialized nurse provide that personalized attention and care during those first couple of weeks postpartum – in the comfort of the family’s home – is truly an incredible way for us to help facilitate the health and overall wellbeing of both moms and newborns.”

“We live in one of the most advanced countries in the world, yet we are still falling short around maternal and infant health, particularly when it comes to health outcomes for women and babies of color,” **said NJ DCF First Deputy Katherine Stoehr**. “Thanks to the Governor, the First Lady, the Legislature and all of our system partners, we are implementing solutions that will begin to address longstanding structural and systemic issues and provide parents and their newborns a real chance at continued health and wellbeing.”

Through a variety of educational and outreach efforts as well as a robust public awareness campaign which includes a 30-second Explainer Video in [English](https://urldefense.com/v3/https://t.e2ma.net/click/37cgyk/nrddit/3zeoj7_!!J30X0ZrnC1oQtbA!Yv-fCxYNNMM9zU9Pc1vJGNbeUFz6lmOVH0tjVq-MMcM4pw2yYEaFh2Wkbg2_P0Ca3A9exoeKB3mhKrga91z0y3Uu02IM$)

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([https://urldefense.com/v3/https://t.e2ma.net/click/37cgyk/nrddit/zkgoj7\\_!!J30X0ZrnC1oQtbA!Yv-fCxYNNMM9zU9Pc1vJGNbeUFz6lmOVH0tjVq-MMcM4pw2yYEaFh2Wkbg2\\_P0Ca3A9exoeKB3mhKrga91z0y4wTjrJl\\$](https://urldefense.com/v3/https://t.e2ma.net/click/37cgyk/nrddit/zkgoj7_!!J30X0ZrnC1oQtbA!Yv-fCxYNNMM9zU9Pc1vJGNbeUFz6lmOVH0tjVq-MMcM4pw2yYEaFh2Wkbg2_P0Ca3A9exoeKB3mhKrga91z0y4wTjrJl$)), the program’s public awareness efforts have garnered nearly 5.5 million impressions or views since the beginning of the year. Additionally, over 12,000 site visits have been recorded on the [program’s website](https://urldefense.com/v3/https://t.e2ma.net/click/37cgyk/nrddit/fdhoj7_!!J30X0ZrnC1oQtbA!Yv-fCxYNNMM9zU9Pc1vJGNbeUFz6lmOVH0tjVq-MMcM4pw2yYEaFh2Wkbg2_P0Ca3A9exoeKB3mhKrga91z0y5bnCCCs$)

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([https://urldefense.com/v3/https://t.e2ma.net/click/37cgyk/nrddit/v5hoj7\\_!!J30X0ZrnC1oQtbA!Yv-fCxYNNMM9zU9Pc1vJGNbeUFz6lmOVH0tjVq-MMcM4pw2yYEaFh2Wkbg2\\_P0Ca3A9exoeKB3mhKrga91z0y4jILZaF\\$](https://urldefense.com/v3/https://t.e2ma.net/click/37cgyk/nrddit/v5hoj7_!!J30X0ZrnC1oQtbA!Yv-fCxYNNMM9zU9Pc1vJGNbeUFz6lmOVH0tjVq-MMcM4pw2yYEaFh2Wkbg2_P0Ca3A9exoeKB3mhKrga91z0y4jILZaF$)), with the very first nurse home visit conducted in the same week the program launched.

“The implementation of the Family Connects NJ program has been three years in the making, and it is heartening to see all the hard work and dedication of the DCF team, our Family Connects NJ nurse providers and system partners

come to fruition,” **said FCP Assistant Commissioner Sanford Starr.** “We are thrilled to know that we are reaching expecting parents and growing families, and that they are not only hearing and learning about the program but taking action and scheduling their visits. At the end of the day, the wellbeing of families and their newborns’ is our greatest reward.”

At the start of the administration, a Black mother was nearly seven times more likely than a white mother to die of pregnancy-related complications, and a Hispanic mother was 3.5 times more likely. A Black baby was nearly three times more likely than a white baby to die before his or her first birthday, and a Hispanic baby 1.5 times.

Family Connects NJ, is an innovative, evidence-based initiative, modeled after the Family Connects International (FCI) ([https://urldefense.com/v3/\\_\\_\\_https://t.e2ma.net/click/37cgyk/nrddit/byioj7\\_\\_\\_;!!J30X0ZrnC1oQtbA!!Yv-fCxYNNMM9zU9Pc1vJGNbeUFz6lmOVH0tjVq-MMcM4pw2yYEaFh2Wkbg2\\_P0Ca3A9exoeKB3mhKrga91z0y3AhgO9E\\$](https://urldefense.com/v3/___https://t.e2ma.net/click/37cgyk/nrddit/byioj7___;!!J30X0ZrnC1oQtbA!!Yv-fCxYNNMM9zU9Pc1vJGNbeUFz6lmOVH0tjVq-MMcM4pw2yYEaFh2Wkbg2_P0Ca3A9exoeKB3mhKrga91z0y3AhgO9E$)), program shown to improve maternal and child health and well-being and reduce health complications for mothers and their newborns.

As one of the programs core components, Family Connects NJ has created a network of community alignment specialists ([https://urldefense.com/v3/\\_\\_\\_https://t.e2ma.net/click/37cgyk/nrddit/rqoj7\\_\\_\\_;!!J30X0ZrnC1oQtbA!!Yv-fCxYNNMM9zU9Pc1vJGNbeUFz6lmOVH0tjVq-MMcM4pw2yYEaFh2Wkbg2\\_P0Ca3A9exoeKB3mhKrga91z0y6Ww934I\\$](https://urldefense.com/v3/___https://t.e2ma.net/click/37cgyk/nrddit/rqoj7___;!!J30X0ZrnC1oQtbA!!Yv-fCxYNNMM9zU9Pc1vJGNbeUFz6lmOVH0tjVq-MMcM4pw2yYEaFh2Wkbg2_P0Ca3A9exoeKB3mhKrga91z0y6Ww934I$)) that work with the program’s nurse providers and with system partners in the community to connect families to appropriate and relevant programs and services, as well as community events that help build familial resilience and connection.

Through a competitive RFP, the following organizations are contracted to offer nursing services via Family Connects NJ in the five counties identified through the first phase of this program:

- Southern New Jersey Perinatal Cooperative (Cumberland and Gloucester Counties)
- Central Jersey Family Health Consortium (Mercer and Middlesex Counties)
- Partnership for Maternal & Child Health of Northern New Jersey (Essex County)

To learn more about Family Connects NJ program visit [www.FamilyConnectsNJ.org](http://www.FamilyConnectsNJ.org) ([https://urldefense.com/v3/\\_\\_\\_https://t.e2ma.net/click/37cgyk/nrddit/7ikoj7\\_\\_\\_;!!J30X0ZrnC1oQtbA!!Yv-fCxYNNMM9zU9Pc1vJGNbeUFz6lmOVH0tjVq-MMcM4pw2yYEaFh2Wkbg2\\_P0Ca3A9exoeKB3mhKrga91z0y7m2twzN\\$](https://urldefense.com/v3/___https://t.e2ma.net/click/37cgyk/nrddit/7ikoj7___;!!J30X0ZrnC1oQtbA!!Yv-fCxYNNMM9zU9Pc1vJGNbeUFz6lmOVH0tjVq-MMcM4pw2yYEaFh2Wkbg2_P0Ca3A9exoeKB3mhKrga91z0y7m2twzN$)). Interested families can schedule a nurse visit [here](https://urldefense.com/v3/___https://t.e2ma.net/click/37cgyk/nrddit/nbloj7___;!!J30X0ZrnC1oQtbA!!Yv-fCxYNNMM9zU9Pc1vJGNbeUFz6lmOVH0tjVq-MMcM4pw2yYEaFh2Wkbg2_P0Ca3A9exoeKB3mhKrga91z0yzqhSPbV$) ([https://urldefense.com/v3/\\_\\_\\_https://t.e2ma.net/click/37cgyk/nrddit/nbloj7\\_\\_\\_;!!J30X0ZrnC1oQtbA!!Yv-fCxYNNMM9zU9Pc1vJGNbeUFz6lmOVH0tjVq-MMcM4pw2yYEaFh2Wkbg2\\_P0Ca3A9exoeKB3mhKrga91z0yzqhSPbV\\$](https://urldefense.com/v3/___https://t.e2ma.net/click/37cgyk/nrddit/nbloj7___;!!J30X0ZrnC1oQtbA!!Yv-fCxYNNMM9zU9Pc1vJGNbeUFz6lmOVH0tjVq-MMcM4pw2yYEaFh2Wkbg2_P0Ca3A9exoeKB3mhKrga91z0yzqhSPbV$)).

“This legislation was born out of my own personal experience with a lactation nurse who visited my home soon after I gave birth to my daughter. The time spent with her changed my whole outlook. She answered my questions and gave me the reassurance I needed as a first-time mother,” **said Majority Leader M. Teresa Ruiz.** “Today marks a significant change in how we protect women and infants in New Jersey. Having a trained nurse visit a postpartum mother and their infant at home can reassure the new parent, catch health concerns, and offer resources and support to the family.”

“Adjusting to life with a newborn is exhausting and oftentimes overwhelming – a time when parents need the most support,” **said Assemblywoman Shanique Speight.** “By offering in-home visits to all new parents, regardless of income, insurance or immigration status, Family Connects NJ uplifts parents and infants, helping families get off to a healthy start. As the world celebrates Maternal Health Awareness Day, I am proud to celebrate this important program and the difference it is making in the lives of parents and their babies.”

“I am a firm believer that prevention and systemic change are the only ways to better the health of entire populations, which is what we, at Family Connects, aim to do. What I love about this program is that it is evidence-based and nurse-led. Nurses are ideal for providing holistic care as we try to set up our families for success by assessing not only their health, but their emotional well-being, environmental safety, parent-child relationships, and parental/social support systems,” **said Grysmeldy González, BSN, RN, Nurse Manager, Family Connects NJ, Middlesex County.**

“I am able to listen firsthand on how useful the resources nurses give are, and how having a medical visit at home is

so convenient. Nurses are very caring and supportive,” **said Mara Carillo, Program Support Specialist, Family Connects NJ, Mercer County.**

“I like the universal home visitation program because new mothers do not need to meet any specific requirements in order to qualify for an in-home visitation. Through Family Connects NJ, we’re making a difference in maternal health within our local community,” **said Catherine Clemens, Nurse Home Visitor.**

“I felt very calm in their presence. It felt like an organic exchange than a medical appointment. I was able to focus and listen better in my home than in the hospital after a 3-day long induction of no sleep. The nurses were respectful of my home, time and privacy. They reassured me of all my concerns and praised me in my breastfeeding accomplishments,” **said the mother who received the first official Family Connects NJ home visit.**

## Governor Phil Murphy

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