

Governor Phil Murphy

ICYMI: DCF Awards Funding to Expand Universal Home Visiting Initiative in New Jersey

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Funding will expand services to six new counties, including Somerset, Sussex, Passaic, Hudson, Bergen and Ocean, beginning January 2025

TRENTON – As part of the State’s efforts to expand Family Connects NJ – New Jersey’s universal nurse home visitation program – the Department of Children and Families (NJDCF) has awarded contracts to two partner-agencies to make free nurse visits available to every family with a newborn in an additional six counties. Beginning January 2025, this lifesaving program will continue in Cumberland, Essex, Gloucester, Mercer, and Middlesex Counties, and expand to Somerset, Sussex, Passaic, Hudson, Bergen, and Ocean Counties.

The law establishing a universal nurse home visitation program was signed by Governor Murphy in July 2021, making New Jersey the second state in the nation to advance a universal home visitation program specifically designed to support parents and families welcoming a newborn through childbirth, adoption, or foster care placement, as well as families that have experienced the tragedy of stillbirth or neonatal loss. Family Connects NJ is a key component to First Lady Tammy Murphy’s Nurture NJ initiative, which aims to make New Jersey the safest, most equitable state in the nation to deliver and raise a baby.

Hypertensive pregnancy disorders are a leading cause of preventable pregnancy-related deaths in New Jersey, and the New Jersey Maternal Mortality Review Committee has found that the majority of pregnancy-related deaths occur postpartum. In fact, in March of this year, a total of 14% of nurse home visits—more than 1 in 10—resulted in a referral of a mother or an infant to the emergency room for follow-up on something that couldn’t wait for the regular checkup, with the most common reason being post-partum hypertension. This is critical since post-partum hypertension is a life-threatening complication commonly associated with stroke, heart failure, and kidney failure.

In January, the program launched in five counties – Cumberland, Essex, Gloucester, Mercer and Middlesex. Families can schedule their post-partum visit with a nurse at Schedule Your Visit – County Select | Family Connects NJ.

“Having a strong support system during the early days of parenthood is crucial. When new parents bring their baby home for the first time, it can be overwhelming. It takes a village to raise a child, and through Family Connects NJ, the State of New Jersey is committing to be part of that village while families adjust to life with a newborn,” **said Governor Phil Murphy.** “This innovative home visitation program raises the bar for

postpartum care by ensuring both new mothers and their babies can access the care and resources they need. I'm pleased to see this successful, life-saving program expand into more New Jersey counties, enabling more families to benefit from critical support."

"Family Connects NJ is the most robust universal nurse home visitation program in the nation, providing the support new mothers need to ensure they and their families are healthy and thriving in the crucial weeks post birth," **said First Lady Tammy Murphy**. "I am thrilled to continue our planned expansion of this vital program as we enter six additional counties starting in January. Family Connects NJ will help cement New Jersey as the gold standard and the safest, most equitable place in the nation to deliver and raise a baby."

"We know that the first weeks of bringing home a newborn can be hectic and stressful, and any extra support that can be provided to a family is a great help," **said NJ DCF Commissioner Christine Norbut Beyer**. "Through the Family Connects NJ program, families will get a nurse visit in the comfort and convenience of their own home, to ensure both parent and baby are doing well, that they receive important health check-ups and screenings, and that the family receives referrals to important services and additional help when necessary. Through this program, we can ensure a healthy start for both baby and their family."

Governor Murphy's FY2025 budget sustains investment to support the continuity of services in the original five counties and expand those services to the next six. Counties will continue to be added to the program until it is available statewide.

Through Family Connects NJ, a specially trained registered nurse (RN) or advanced practice nurse (APN) visits the family within approximately two weeks of the child's birth. The program is free and entirely voluntary for New Jersey families welcoming a new baby, without any eligibility restrictions. Families will be eligible for up to three visits depending on their needs, but are typically served by one, 90-minute visit.

The Family Connects NJ expansion was awarded through an open bid via the State's formal request for proposals process. The awarded partner-agencies, Central Jersey Family Health Consortium and the Partnership for Maternal and Child Health of Northern NJ, Inc., will expand the program into the six new counties – Somerset, Sussex, Passaic, Hudson, Bergen, and Ocean Counties – in the new year.

Similar to the initially awarded agency partners, partner-agencies will be responsible for maintaining a team of RNs and support staff to provide services to families in the regions where the program is implemented.

Approximately 46% of the nurse provider staff of the UHV program are multilingual. When staff who speak the family's language are not available, translation is arranged. Since January, nurse visits have occurred in seventeen languages other than English – with the most common being Spanish, French, Brazilian Portuguese, Haitian Creole, and Hindi – supporting the unique needs of the respective communities.

"The beauty of this program is that the specialized nurses are trained to be able to address the many questions that all new parents have when bringing home a baby," **said Katherine Stoehr, First Deputy Commissioner at DCF**. "In those early weeks after the birth of a baby, having a professional explain things to you, in your own language, at a time that works best for you without the stress of traveling to an office can help parents feel reassured that they are doing everything right for their baby. It's so important to help build parents' confidence and knowledge of what to do during what can be such a trying time."

The evidence-based Family Connects model, which has been implemented in regions across the nation, has been shown to reduce postpartum depression and anxiety among mothers. The model has reduced emergency department visits and overnight hospital stays by 50% in the baby's first year of life, lowered rates of child protective services involvement, and been proven to increase a family's connections to community resources and educational materials.

"Not only are we seeing a lot of the same success as other jurisdictions with our universal home visiting

program, but our data shows how lifesaving this program has truly been in the counties where we are already live,” **said Sanford Starr, Assistant Commissioner for DCF’s Division of Family and Community Partnerships, the department’s lead division implementing Family Connects NJ.**

As part of the Family Connects NJ initiative, a statewide network of community alignment specialists, located in Connecting NJ hubs, has been developed to help connect nurse providers to programs and support available within their communities and to provide educational resources to new families about the services and programs for which they may be eligible.

To learn more about Family Connects NJ, visit <https://www.familyconnectsnj.org/> (<https://www.familyconnectsnj.org/>).

To learn more about Nurture NJ, visit <https://nurturenj.nj.gov/> (<https://nurturenj.nj.gov/>).

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