

# Improving Birth Outcomes Through Family Support



How a child develops is the foundation for a prosperous community. Starting even before birth, a child's brain architecture is being constructed through an ongoing process that continues into adulthood. Yet, many children experience stress early on that can affect the developing architecture of their brain and have a long-term impact on their ability to learn, be healthy, and fully contribute to our society.

A healthy pregnancy is important to establish the sturdiest foundation for a child's future. A parent's level of stress and past trauma can impact how a child develops starting in the womb. As a community, we can support families with the right opportunities, including access to good-paying jobs, a safe home and healthy food, physical and mental health care, and connections in the community.

**Nine2Thrive was developed to connect pregnant mothers with signs of stress to support, improving birth outcomes for babies.**

## HOW NINE2THRIVE WORKS

A mother completes an initial intake assessment during a prenatal visit. If she identifies stressors on the assessment, the obstetrician or midwife refers the mother to a support specialist. The support specialist reaches out to the family to understand the sources of stress or concerns and connects the family to services in the community. The specialist then checks in with the family throughout the pregnancy and follows up with the health care clinic on the support the family is receiving.

## WHY IT MATTERS

Iowa mothers report experiencing stressors that can impact their children's development even before being born. Research shows that an increase of stress in a mother correlates to an increase in cortisol levels in the placenta, which indicates stress for the baby.



Two out of three Iowa mothers report experiencing **at least one stressor** in the 12 months before giving birth



One out of four Iowa mothers experience **three or more stressors**

Source: Iowa's Pregnancy Risk Assessment Monitoring System survey

Challenging social conditions can increase the level of stress for parents: Of mothers on public health insurance, 13% experienced six or more stressors, compared with 6% among Iowa's total population.

For more information, visit [www.IowaAces360.org](http://www.IowaAces360.org)



## ► Pilot Study of Nine2Thrive

A pilot program throughout 2019 showed impressive results for mom and baby.



The pilot partnership was launched between EveryStep, the visiting nurse association and hospice provider of central and southern Iowa, and Iowa ACEs 360, a nonprofit working to improve the health and well-being of Iowans by addressing childhood trauma. Funded by Mid-Iowa Health Foundation, the partnership was launched in the birthing clinic at Broadlawns Medical Center, a large public hospital operating in Des Moines.

“Without Nine2Thrive, I can’t do anything outside the scope of [the patient’s] immediate needs during the appointment, whereas EveryStep can look at the full picture of the patient’s health status and needs.”

– Gigi Wilwerding,  
referring provider to the program

### WHO IT SERVED

Among those who participated in the Nine2Thrive program in 2019:

- Average age was 26
- 82% were mothers of color
- About half were refugees or immigrants
- 98% had less than a college degree
- 78% were from households with incomes less than \$25,000 annually

Lower educational attainment and lower income have been shown to increase the likelihood of poor birth outcomes.

### SUPPORT PROVIDED

In one year, Nine2Thrive received 94 referrals from the medical clinic. Reasons for referrals included maternal stress (74%) and maternal concerns (22%), such as financial concerns, overall lack of help, housing challenges, diagnosis of gestational diabetes, neighborhood safety, being new to the country, and transportation.

On average, Nine2Thrive worked with mothers for six months and made an average of 24 contacts with each mother. For every referral received, specialists made on average six connections to community-based resources. Referrals were made for case management services, financial support, home visiting, concrete resources (baby supplies, food, etc.), and more.

### OUTCOMES

48 mothers continued with services throughout their pregnancy and had their babies by the time of the evaluation. Based on demographic data, participants were at greater risk for poor birth outcomes, but **women in the program had better outcomes** than the average Medicaid population and were on par with state averages. Women showed positive outcomes for attending prenatal visits, having fewer low-weight births, and carrying to full term.

With the average cost of pre-term births at \$58,000, improved birth outcomes means an additional cost savings for families and the state.

### BENEFITS TO HEALTH CARE PROVIDERS

A health care provider who participated in the project identified these benefits:

- Increased capacity to serve patients
- Improved patient care
- Stronger relationships with patients
- Increased perceived value from appointments
- Increased appointment attendance rates

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