Improving Maternal-child Health Through Research: Shining a Spotlight on 3 Projects for Mother's Day

Family & Community Health

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As we approach Mother's Day, we often think of the people who have nurtured, cared for, taught, encouraged and empowered us throughout our lifetime. One of the definitions of a mother is someone who brings up a child with care and affection. Mother's Day celebrates all the caregivers in your life that have influenced you because a mother transcends biology. This day is dedicated to all the mothers and caregivers who pour their time and love into the next generation.

We know that the health of a mother impacts the health of their child. As a new member of PolicyLab, I am honored to take part in initiatives to improve maternal and child health in our Philadelphia community and beyond. PolicyLab has many projects that aim to enhance the health and well-being of mothers, birthing people and parents through evidence-based approaches. Two of the projects I have the privilege of working on as a Clinical Research Assistant are HealthySteps and Community Clinical Systems Integration – Home Visiting (CCSI-HV).

Two-generation strategies that address both the health of mothers and their children have proven effective in supporting the needs of infants and toddlers. One such model that uses this approach is HealthySteps, a pediatric primary care model that supports healthy early childhood development, positive parenting and caregiver well-being. Within the model, a child and family development professional connects with families during pediatric well-child visits for patients ages 0 to 3, offering screening and support for common and complex parenting challenges, such as feeding, sleep, maternal depression, and adapting to life with a baby or young child. While there is evidence to support this approach broadly, there is currently no evidence on implementation and effectiveness of HealthySteps in the Philadelphia community, and current payment structures do not allow for sustainable funding. Our team is conducting a project to grow the evidence base for this model and will include advocacy efforts to support program sustainability in Pennsylvania. More widespread implementation of HealthySteps would provide caregivers with enhanced support in the earliest years of their child's life, contributing to the overall well-being of both the caregiver and child.

Home visiting provides another opportunity to support both caregivers and their children. CCSI-HV is a model that utilizes existing evidence-based nurse-led home visiting services as part of the clinical care team within Children's Hospital of Philadelphia's (CHOP) pediatric primary care network. The goal of this strategy is to create a transformative, sustainable model that centers public health nurse home visitors as a bridge between preventive care delivery systems in home and clinical settings. This model aims to improve patient care by creating consistent communication between the nurse home visitor, families and the child's pediatric provider. Early implementation has revealed that a stronger, more coordinated care team that extends the health system's reach into the communities it serves offers tremendous opportunity to move the needle on complex public health issues related to child and family health. To further understand the impact of CCSI-HV, our team is

leading a mixed methods evaluation that aims to assess provider and caregiver satisfaction, coordination of care for patients, and child health outcomes and utilization.

I'm also aware of another project members of my team are working on to improve maternal health services that seeks to support equitable access to evidence-based treatment for pregnant and postpartum people with opioid use disorder (OUD). OUD in pregnancy and the postpartum period is linked to adverse health outcomes for both mothers and infants. The PolicyLab team identified an absence of and/or unmet need for specialized programs offering Medication-Assisted Treatment (MAT) to pregnant and postpartum persons in Pennsylvania counties with disproportionate need for services. Now, the team is in the midst of a mixed-method study that has significant potential to identify opportunities and best practices for evidence-based treatment engagement of this population of caregivers with particular focus on geographic and racial inequities.

These projects contribute to our research portfolio designed to build evidence for and evaluate sustainable family-centered programs that improve the health of children and their families—and represent just a small sampling of the projects PolicyLab is undertaking to support and promote maternal and child health.

Mother's Day is a wonderful day to celebrate the people that have nurtured us, and we also recognize that this day can be difficult for those who may have experienced loss, estrangement, infertility or other challenging experiences related to motherhood. I am so happy to be part of a team that is working to contribute knowledge and data and ensure equitable access to care and programs for mothers and families—the benefits of which will last a lifetime.