How One Innovative Program is Addressing Young Parents' Hidden Needs

Family & Community Health

Date Posted:

Nov 11, 2026



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A 16-year-old sits in a primary care office waiting room, gently rocking her 1-month-old baby. To get to the appointment, she took public transit, carrying her newborn through crowded train cars. She worries about walking back to the station after dark.

During the checkup, the pediatrician confirms that her baby is growing, feeding and developing well. The young mother is relieved. She doesn't mention that she is unsure how she will afford the next can of formula or where she and her baby will sleep next week.

She also doesn't say that she has been feeling overwhelmed, exhausted and alone. She worries that asking for help will make people think she is a bad mom—or, terrifyingly, that her baby could be taken away.

Many young parents carry hidden needs into their baby's visits. A baby's well-child appointment may be one of the few reliable care touchpoints for a young family, yet the parent's health, needs and goals may go unaddressed during a brief appointment. Too often, young parents and their children receive care in separate systems, even though both can receive care in pediatric settings and their well-being is closely linked.

Below, I'll describe an innovative program at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia (CHOP) that provides care for young parents and their children in the same place, at the same time.

Reaching Young Parents Through Dyadic Care

Dyadic care recognizes the parent and child as interconnected and provides care for both during the same visit. This approach considers how the parent's physical health, emotional well-being, safety, and practical circumstances can affect the child's health and development.

Babies have ten recommended preventive care visits during a child's first two years of life. Many adolescent parents attend their baby's appointments while postponing care for themselves.

The Center for Health Equity hosts the Cobbs Creek Teen Infant Clinic (TIC) at CHOP which pairs routine infant care with medical, behavioral health and practical support for young parents. This approach reduces the burden

of navigating multiple systems, creates opportunities to identify needs early and supports follow-through over time.

Why This Model Is Needed

Adolescent-led families in Philadelphia may face overlapping social, economic, and behavioral health challenges during a crucial period for both child and parent development. Young parents may be managing food or housing insecurity, limited transportation and child care, insurance instability, and school or employment demands all while caring for a new baby and navigating stigmas associated with adolescent parenthood.

Health care and social-service systems are often fragmented and confusing. Young families are expected to coordinate across multiple types of health care, school and often several other systems. CHOP research has shown that adolescent parents often don't return to care consistently after pregnancy or birth. And referrals alone do not always result in completed care when transportation, child care, scheduling, confidentiality concerns or distrust create additional barriers.

Some young parents have experienced trauma, adverse childhood experiences, or negative interactions with health care systems that may make it harder for them to seek help or trust providers. Additionally, parenting adolescents also have an elevated risk of perinatal depression and anxiety.

The Teen Infant Clinic Model

With the goal of helping young families navigate these challenges, every week TIC schedules up to five parent-baby pairs for extended, coordinated back-to-back visits at Cobbs Creek Primary Care. In TIC, families receive comprehensive care from as soon as their baby's newborn checkups through their 24-month visit, in one familiar setting with a consistent care team.

On a typical Monday night, that visit could include the following team members and care:

A pediatrician provides well-child care for the infant, including growth and developmental monitoring, preventive care, immunizations and additional medical care as needed.

A nurse practitioner with expertise in adolescent medicine provides routine health care for the teen parent, supports reproductive health care needs and coordinates referrals when appropriate.

A HealthySteps licensed clinical social worker supports caregiver and infant mental health, parent-child relationships, positive parenting practices, and healthy child development. They also help families navigate social and emotional needs, Early Intervention, and connection to appropriate resources and education.

A community health worker (CHW) builds trusting relationships with the young parent and family while connecting them with resources that address health-related social needs. CHWs serve as a bridge between families, the health care team and community-based supports. During visits, they check in with the family, provide milestone-appropriate gifts, diapers and wipes, and identify immediate needs. Between visits, they maintain contact by phone, help schedule follow-up appointments, coordinate rideshares and coach young parents as they work toward personal goals.

Measuring Impact

Between May 1, 2023, and September 28, 2026, the program provided 190 infant visits and 179 adolescent visits. Early evidence suggests that well-child visit completion rates and vaccination rates are substantially higher among TIC participants than the overall patient population at Cobbs Creek. Among families who participated in TIC for at least four visits, 91% of infants completed all six recommended immunizations before

age 2, compared with 63% among a similar infant population at Cobbs Creek. In addition, 94% completed their 15-month well-child visit, compared with 68% at Cobbs Creek overall.

Despite promising findings on Teen Tot Programs, they are rarely implemented.

Building Trust Through Consistency

By building trust over time, TIC may help reduce fear and uncertainty around health care and encourage families to seek care with greater confidence. The goal is for these supportive experiences to extend *beyond* TIC, helping young parents feel more comfortable asking questions, navigating health care and connecting with resources throughout their child's life.

As one of our team members shared about a TIC family, "*I don't think that this family would be coming to well care proactively without this clinic. Mom has increased a lot of her understanding about [the] importance of frequent well care and has put an emphasis on her well-being and sexual health due to increased confidence and trust."*

By caring for a parent and their baby together, TIC offers more than just an appointment: it provides a familiar team, practical support, and a trusted place where young families can be seen, heard, and supported.