

## **Building Block 1: Universal Nurse Home Visiting for Pregnant Women and Families with Newborn Children**

**What is Universal Nurse Home Visiting for Pregnant Women and Families with Newborn Children?** Anyone who has had a child knows that there are times when you have doubts and questions and wonder whether you have the skills and knowledge needed to be a successful parent. We are fortunate in the North Country that each county has public health nurses who visit pregnant women and families with newborn children to answer questions and make sure families are aware of and connected to the community resources they need to raise healthy children. Universal nurse home visiting is a community resource that is targeted at **ALL** families. During their visits nurses, can provide a weight and health check for the baby and make sure the mother is recovering well from childbirth. Some families may also benefit from a range of other community resources that the nurses are uniquely equipped to provide such as assistance with breastfeeding, selecting child care, finding financial resources and parenting classes, identifying and coping with postpartum depression, dealing with social isolation or new family dynamics, and making sure every child is connected to a pediatric practice and has health insurance. The nurses are experts in supporting families of newborns with resources right here in our community. Typically, families only receive a single visit, but occasionally family request repeated visits over a short period.

**Why does Universal Nurse Home Visiting for Pregnant Women and Families with Newborn Children matter?** The research is clear, the first years of a child's life are critical to their overall development and their success in school and life. The relationship that parents form with their babies will have a life-long impact on their child's development and learning. Children do not come with an owner's manual and the knowledge and skills needed to raise healthy, happy children are not something that everyone is born with nor are they handed to parents before they leave the hospital with their new child. Many parents struggle during the first few weeks of their child's life knowing how to feed and communicate with their baby. Knowing that skilled nurses are available to answer questions when a problem arises helps a new parent feel confident and supported. Nurse home visitors also provide an important role in linking families that have a need for supports and services to the appropriate provider in their community.

**What are the Benefits for the Community of Providing Universal Home Visiting for Pregnant Women and Families with Newborn Children?** Children who get a right start in life are more likely to succeed in school and are less likely to need special education, experience behavior problems, and become involved in the criminal justice system. Identifying children and families in need of services as early as possible is critical to ameliorating the effect of problems before they become more serious and require more costly interventions. New parents are often unaware of the resources that are available to them in the community. By connecting families in need of community resources to the appropriate provider, nurse home visitors become a critical lynchpin in a coordinated and responsive system of health, education, and human services across the region.

**What needs to be done to make Universal Home Visiting for Pregnant Women and Families with Newborn Children available to all families in the region?** Our goal is for every family that would like a nurse home visit would receive one or more visits and that each home visit would include providing information on the range of resources available in the community to support families. Currently, due to declining state and federal funding, county nurse home visiting programs only serve a small proportion of pregnant women and families with newborns.

To address this issue, the Adirondack Birth to Three Alliance is investigating how to maximize existing funding sources as well as accessing new funding opportunities made available through health care reform and Medicaid redesign to support the expansion of these services. As part of this effort, the Adirondack Birth to Three Alliance is looking at ways to better coordinate the various programs that are available to pregnant women and new parents to ensure that a common set of information on community resources is made available.

To enhance the information that pregnant women and new parents receive during nurse home visits, the Adirondack Birth to Three Alliance applied for and has been chosen to participate in a pilot test of a New Parent Kit developed by the NYS Parenting Education Partnership and the NYS Council on Children and Families. The New Parent Kit includes the *New Parent Guide* – a kind of owners’ manual for families with newborns. The Guide provides advice for new parents, including information on available resources. The kit also includes a helpful book - *What to Do When Your Child Gets Sick*. The Adirondack Birth to Three Alliance will be working with each of the county nurse home visiting programs and others who work with pregnant women and families with newborns to provide the New Parent Kit to the families they visit. Finally, the Adirondack Birth to Three Alliance and the Adirondack Foundation have taken steps to augment the materials families receive, including providing families with Safe Sleepers, baby clothes, and other materials.