

February 2024

Summary of the Rigorous Research on Comprehensive Screening and Connection Programs

Comprehensive screening and connection programs (CSCPs) are defined, in part, by the broad scope of their services: In addition to physical health screenings, families are screened for important factors that contribute to overall wellbeing. These factors include developmental delays, maternal depression, and social predictors of health—including exposure to violence, food insecurity, housing insecurity, financial resource strain, and substance use.



EMERGING EVIDENCE FOR IMPACTS ON CHILD AND FAMILY WELLBEING

Identifying needs through screenings alone is not enough to substantially improve child outcomes; referrals to, and initiation of, effective services are key aspects of these approaches to address identified areas of need. CSCPs facilitate a warm hand-off to the resources or services families need and follow up with families to verify the receipt of services or inquire about barriers to services. Local sites partner with health care providers, early child care providers, and community-based organizations, among others, to address the needs of families.

Although many local and statewide programs have screening and referral components, the three evidence-based and rigorously studied CSCPs are Developmental Understanding and Legal Collaboration for Everyone (DULCE), Family Connects, and HealthySteps.

States may take several approaches to increase the number of families who can access a CSCP. Strategies include enacting legislation to expand one of the three evidence-based programs, or a similar model, across the state; establishing a home-grown program designed similarly to one of the three evidence-based programs; or billing Medicaid for health care services such as maternal depression screenings.

EVIDENCE-BASED POLICYMAKING

The Prenatal-to-3 Policy Impact Center at Vanderbilt University analyzes rigorous evidence to determine which policies are proven to produce positive outcomes for young children, their families, and society. A comprehensive review of the evidence reveals that CSCPs are an effective strategy to improve child and parent health and developmental outcomes.

RIGOROUS STUDIES FIND THE FOLLOWING IMPACTS

CSCPs improve child health and development.

- By child age 1, Family Connects families reduced emergency department visits by 50%.
- DULCE families were 15 percentage points more likely to have received immunizations on time at child age 6 months.
- HealthySteps families were 3 percentage points less likely to put their infants in the wrong sleep position.

CSCPs improve maternal mental health.

- Family Connects reduced disparities in maternal anxiety by 48.3% and maternal depression by 43.5% between Black and White mothers.
- Family Connects mothers were 8.3 percentage points less likely to report possible clinical anxiety.

CSCPs improve child care quality.

- Out-of-home care quality was rated higher (0.66 points on a 5-point scale) among Family Connects families using nonparental care.

CSCPs increase access to needed services.

- DULCE families received an average of 0.5 more community resources at the 6 and 12 month program follow up.
- Family Connects families accessed 0.9 more community resources.
- HealthySteps families had 3.5 times higher odds of being informed about community resources.
- DULCE families had an 11 percentage point increase in the likelihood of attending at least 5 routine health care visits by 12 months, and HealthySteps families had 1.7 times greater odds of attending the 12-month well-child visit.

For more information on CSCPs:

- Refer to our comprehensive evidence review for additional detail on and citations for the above-referenced studies: <https://pn3policy.org/policy-clearinghouse/comprehensive-screening-and-connection-programs/>.
- Refer to our Prenatal-to-3 State Policy Roadmap for state progress and variation: <https://pn3policy.org/pn-3-state-policy-roadmap-2023/us/comprehensive-screenings/>.
- Refer to our state policy lever checklist for necessary considerations to maximize the effectiveness of comprehensive screening and connection programs: <https://pn3policy.org/state-policy-lever-checklist-cscp/>.