



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact:

Felicia K. Taylor, MBA, CAE
Chief Executive Officer
ftaylor@njaap.org
609.842.0014

**New Jersey Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics Secures \$4 Million HRSA Cooperative Agreement to Launch New Jersey SEEDlings: Supporting Equity in Early Development
*Transforming Pediatrics in Early Childhood (TPEC)***

EAST WINDSOR, NJ, September 26, 2022 – The [New Jersey Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics](#) (NJAAP) was awarded a four-year cooperative agreement from the [Health Resources and Services Administration](#) (HRSA) to transform how pediatric primary care is delivered for prenatal-to-five-year-old (P-5) populations eligible for NJ FamilyCare or who are uninsured. This initiative will bring together a diverse group of medical experts in pediatrics and obstetrics, parent advocates, and HealthySteps (HS) practice leaders to improve early developmental and social-emotional health, school readiness, family well-being, and health equity outcomes. New Jersey is one of four states selected to receive such funding from HRSA, with an additional award made to [Zero to Three](#) to support the establishment of the Early Childhood Developmental Health Systems Evidence to Impact National Center to support state’s efforts.

“The HRSA investment in pediatric primary care transformation is a groundbreaking commitment from the federal government to better support our nation’s babies and toddlers,” emphasized HealthySteps National Director, Rahil Briggs, PsyD. “New Jersey joined the HealthySteps network in 2021 as part of a locally driven effort to strengthen supports to families through a HealthySteps pilot initiative in partnership with Hackensack Meridian Health, The Burke Foundation, The Nicholson Foundation, and the Turrell Fund. NJAAP’s TPEC award takes that work to the next level. The HealthySteps National Office is proud to partner with NJAAP in transforming the way NJ families experience healthcare and helping them to thrive.”

As of 2020, NJ is home to 513,951 infants and toddlers ages five and under, 29.9% of whom live in households with an income less than twice the federal poverty level (FPL); 12% of NJ families live below the FPL. A disproportionately high number of infants and toddlers of color live in poverty in NJ. There are also stark disparities in maternal and infant health outcomes among minority racial and ethnic groups in NJ, with the infant mortality rate for Black babies 3 times higher than White babies. Given the significant difference seen in the prenatal and birth data for low-income women enrolled in NJ FamilyCare in NJ as compared to those with other insurance, HRSA’s TPEC funding in New Jersey provides critical support in vulnerable communities where it is most needed.

“NJAAP’s TPEC award is going to expand the number of young children and families who have access to HealthySteps in two communities in New Jersey where significant health disparities exist,” said Pamela Winkler Tew, LSW, Senior Policy Analyst & HealthySteps New Jersey Lead. “This is a critical next step in our goal of making sure all of New Jersey’s babies and toddlers have access to evidence-based supports like HealthySteps, to ensure a strong start in life.”

First-year funding of \$1 million will catalyze the growth of HS in NJ. Over the four-year project period, NJSEEDlings will build critical infrastructure to advance early developmental health and family-strengthening efforts in the state by funding the launch of eight additional HS sites, connecting all new and existing New Jersey-based HS sites to one another, and offering comprehensive ECD education to all HS sites throughout the state. Through these efforts, NJSEEDlings will improve equitable access to a continuum of ECD services in pediatric Patient-Centered Medical Homes and enhance the capacity of pediatric practices to deliver high-quality ECD services that address the holistic needs of children and families.

“This cooperative agreement provides an exciting opportunity to build on NJAAP’s work in addressing disparities by supporting families during the critical prenatal to 5-year period that sets the stage for long-term outcomes,” noted Usha Ramachandran, MD, FAAP, NJAAP’s Early Childhood Champion. “Through building partnerships with parents and key stakeholders, and adopting a collaborative learning approach, we hope to bring about a transformation of pediatric primary care that emphasizes a family-centered, strengths-based approach to support family well-being and infant-caregiver relationships and promote early childhood development. By integrating evidence-based programs such as [Reach Out and Read](#) and the [Keystones of Development](#) curriculum, we will equip pediatric practices to adopt universal promotion and prevention efforts with all families, along with additional supports based on family needs and risks through HealthySteps.”

To disseminate best practices and share support, guidance, and feedback across sites, NJSEEDlings will also utilize the Project ECHO® model. Monthly sessions provide pediatric practice teams with opportunities for case-based learning and quality improvement to attain established ECD goals. Additionally, this funding will support the launch of a broader Learning Community to bring awareness to ECD supports available to practices and families and build a network of connections among NJ’s early childhood partners.

The relational health framework embedded throughout this initiative draws on findings from the [2021 AAP Policy Statement on Preventing Childhood Toxic Stress](#), which emphasizes the importance of relationships and positive experiences in childhood to prevent and heal from the impacts of toxic stress. “By focusing on the safe, stable, and nurturing relationships (SSNRs) that buffer adversity and build resilience, pediatric care is on the cusp of a paradigm shift that could reprioritize clinical activities, rewrite research agendas, and realign our collective advocacy. Driving this transformation are advances in developmental sciences as they inform a deeper understanding of how early life experiences, both nurturing and adverse, are biologically embedded and influence outcomes in health, education, and economic stability across the life span,” notes the Policy Statement from the AAP Committee on

Psychosocial Aspects of Child and Family Health, Section on Developmental and Behavioral Pediatrics and the Council on Early Childhood. “The American Academy of Pediatrics asserts that SSNRs are biological necessities for all children because they mitigate childhood toxic stress responses and proactively build resilience by fostering the adaptive skills needed to cope with future adversity in a healthy manner.”

About NJAAP

New Jersey Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics is dedicated to improving the health and well-being of children in the state of New Jersey. The growing Chapter represents over 1,900 pediatricians and other pediatric healthcare professionals located in every county throughout New Jersey. NJAAP provides a strong voice on behalf of children, the adults in their lives, and the pediatricians who care for them. For additional details and to learn more about how to become a member of NJAAP, please visit www.njaap.org, www.facebook.com/AAPNJ or follow [@NewJerseyAAP](https://twitter.com/NewJerseyAAP) on Twitter.

About Zero to Three

Zero to Three works to ensure all babies and toddlers benefit from the family and community connections critical to their well-being and development. Since 1977, the organization has advanced the proven power of nurturing relationships by transforming the science of early childhood into helpful resources, practical tools, and responsive policies for millions of parents, professionals, and policymakers. For more information, and to learn how to become a ZERO TO THREE member, please visit www.zerotothree.org, www.facebook.com/zerotothree or follow [@zerotothree](https://twitter.com/zerotothree) on Twitter.

About HRSA

HRSA programs provide equitable health care to people who are geographically isolated and economically or medically vulnerable. HRSA’s mission is to improve health outcomes and achieve health equity through access to quality services, a skilled health workforce, and innovative, high-value programs. The Maternal and Child Health Bureau administers programs, supports research, and invests in workforce training to ensure the health and well-being of mothers, children, and families across their lives. In partnership with states and communities, the Bureau supports health care and public health services for an estimated 55 million people nationwide.

This project is supported by the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) as part of an annual award totaling \$1,000,000 with no percentage financed with non-governmental sources. The contents are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the official views of, nor an endorsement, by HRSA, HHS, or the U.S. Government. For more information, please visit www.HRSA.gov.