



New Jersey

Project HOPE works to ensure equitable access to health services and healthy development opportunities for children under five and their families by partnering with states and local organizations on policies and programs that result in systems change.

Background

Since 2018, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation has funded a Consortium of three grantees to implement Project HOPE in New Jersey. These grantees include Nemours Children's Health System, the BUILD Initiative, and Boston Medical Center Vital Village Network. The Consortium supports and provides technical assistance to both a state team and community leaders to develop plans to address inequities impacting young children and families through cross-sector work. New Jersey's cross-sector state team is the Interdepartmental Planning Group (IPG), consisting of the administrators from each of the state's departments with oversight of programs and services for children from pregnancy to age eight.

Based on their analysis of state and local data, IPG leaders selected health and child care as the areas of focus for advancing their program, practice and policy change agendas in Atlantic City and Bridgeton. By hosting community site visits to convene community stakeholders, the IPG hopes to learn more about experiences with state-funded services and develop feedback loops for improving them.

In New Jersey, HOPE is focused on two targeted communities identified by the IPG, Bridgeton and Atlantic City, as well as Essex County Council for Young Children. At the state level there are health and child care strategies that can be targeted and leveraged, intersecting with workforce, to increase access to a range of training and employment opportunities, including paid family leave benefits.

Cross Sector State Stakeholder Group (CSSSG)

The New Jersey Interdepartmental Planning Group (IPG) serves as the CSSSG for New Jersey. This group consists of administrators from each of the state's departments with oversight of programs and services for children from pregnancy to age eight, including representatives from:

- Department of Children and Families
- Department of Education
- Department of Health
- Department of Human Services
- Department of Labor and Workforce Development
- Head Start Collaboration Office

Communities of Focus

Atlantic City
Bridgeton

To support state efforts, Nemours provides support in the following Infrastructure Areas:

- Communication
- Data
- Finance
- Governance
- Leadership

Complementary Initiatives

In addition to Project HOPE, state partners are engaged in several other initiatives focused on improving the health and wellbeing of young children.

- Early Childhood Comprehensive System
 - The New Jersey ECCS, led by the Department of Health - Division of Family Health Services, aims to initiate, facilitate, implement and sustain coordinated linkages between early childhood stakeholders, government, community services, parents and professionals.
- Pritzker Children's Initiative (PCI)
 - Advocates for Children of New Jersey received funding from the national Pritzker Children's Initiative to strengthen and streamline a more efficient, effective and well-funded system of early care and education.
- Preschool Development Grant Birth through 5 (PDG B-5)
 - The PDG B-5, awarded to the Department of Children and Families, aims to promote a comprehensive, coordinated early childhood system of care in addressing the physical, social-emotional, behavioral and cognitive aspects of child wellbeing and school readiness.
- Nurture NJ
 - Tammy Murphy, The First Lady of New Jersey, launched Nurture NJ, a statewide awareness campaign to reduce maternal and infant mortality.

Community Engagement Activities

Since 2019, the New Jersey Interdepartmental Planning Group led several activities to increase the capacity of parents and stakeholders to establish feedback loops and incorporate community voice in local/state initiatives.

Atlantic City/Bridgeton Provider Meetings

Community stakeholders, early care providers and New Jersey department representatives are being convened to elevate community voice, identify priority issues, and continue the development of an effective feedback loop to address these areas of concern.

Parents Engaging Parents

Parents Engaging Parents conducted several virtual engagements with Atlantic City and Bridgeton to develop parent and community leaders to increase and maintain engagement with families, while promoting civic literacy to help address identified issues in these regions.

Community Site Visits

The HOPE state leadership team, along with the BUILD Initiative and Boston Medical Center Vital Village, organized visits with community members to learn about their experiences accessing services in the target communities of Atlantic City and Bridgeton.

Achievements

- Established summer child care in Atlantic City
- Distributed COVID-19-related emergency direct assistance from Parents Engaging Parents - 443 kits containing education materials, infant formula, diapers, and personal protective equipment for Atlantic City and Bridgeton families with children ages birth to five years old
- Expanded communication and partnership at the local and county level, through community service provider meetings

Action Plan Strategies

To improve access to programs and services for children birth-through-five and their families, partners in New Jersey are hoping to implement strategies, including:

- Improve outreach and communication to families and general public to inform of child care options across program setting.
- Help families in Atlantic City and Bridgeton displaced by Covid-19 to secure childcare and job training through collaboration between Head Start, childcare centers and Department of Labor One-Stop Career Centers in both communities.
- Bring together county-level workforce job training providers to further explore employment issues, including opportunities and barriers.
- Increase visibility of local options for childcare/preschool, including existing state PreK funding. Explore preschool and childcare wrap around options.
- Convene three meetings with providers in targeted areas to continue building collective action and shared understanding.

Support for this State Profile was provided by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. The views expressed here do not necessarily reflect the views of the Foundation.