We know many of Iowa’s young children are facing challenges. More than one in five Iowa children ages four months to 5 years are at moderate or high risk of developmental, behavioral or social delays. Among children at risk for developmental delays, only 50 percent are detected prior to school entry, when early intervention has the greatest impact. Chronic stress in the form of family stress, caregiver depression and other environmental factors is detrimental to developing brains, particularly in the youngest years.

We also know health providers are key partners in the early identification of the factors hindering healthy development. Over 95 percent of children birth to age 5 visit a health provider for preventive health care—far more than utilize any other formal support system.

In 2007, Iowa created the 1st Five initiative to support health providers in identifying the often complex and wide-ranging needs of children and families and link them to community resources. After five years, the initiative has shown to be effective in that mission.

**KEY FINDINGS**

- **Almost 5,000 children and their families have been referred by health providers to 1st Five** for support and connections to community resources since 2007. A speech or hearing concern is the number one reason for an initial health provider referral to 1st Five, with family stress a close second.

- **Almost 12,000 connections to local resources have been made** for these families across seven 1st Five sites. Connections to resources such as food, housing, energy assistance, child care and preschool, employment assistance and transportation are most common, with health-related referrals, such as immunizations, lead screening, vision testing and specialty care, second.

- **1st Five supports practice change**, helping Iowa health providers implement standardized, research-based tools to better identify the full range of family needs, including caregiver depression and family stress.

“(1st Five) is helping me deliver the kind of health care that I know kids and families need.”

Dr. Angela Townsend
Covenant Clinic, Waterloo
1st Five’s reach in Iowa
2007-2012

- **7** Coordinating sites
- **13** Iowa counties
- **83** Health practices
- **284** Providers
  ***
- **77,000** Estimated number of children birth to age 5 reached
- **4,985** Families referred from health providers into 1st Five
- **11,736** Connections from 1st Five out to community services
- **1,218** Children referred by 1st Five to well-child care
- **3.25** Community connections made for each family engaged in 1st Five care coordination
- **33% → 93%** Share of health providers including comprehensive developmental assessment before and after 1st Five involvement

1st Five care coordinators are the link between health providers and a broad range of community services

- **1st Five has been described by participating providers as an easy-to-implement remedy to the challenge (identified by the providers and supported by a recent U.S. physician survey) that doctors do not have the time, staff support or knowledge of community resources to address the full range of patient needs.**

- **Relationships are key** to success and sustainability of the 1st Five initiative. The work requires time-intensive and ongoing relationship building with health providers, community organizations and families.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Bolster community services.** 1st Five care coordinators report lack of timely access to local resources like affordable housing, child and adult mental-health support, bilingual services, pediatric developmental services, transportation and child care in both rural and urban areas of the state. Long drives and waiting lists are common. These shortages limit 1st Five’s ability to connect families to resources, even when needs have been identified.

- **Sustain current 1st Five sites.** Assure existing 1st Five sites have the resources to sustain momentum and expand to additional providers as needed. As sites move from “start up” to “sustaining” status, state funding decreases. This decreases their capacity to maintain relationships with health providers, which is reflected in a decrease in referral numbers in sustaining sites.

- **Develop an implementation and funding plan for statewide expansion** to make 1st Five care coordination available to health providers regardless of where they are located.

Sources:
2. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

For more information on this evaluation, contact CFPC research director Michelle Stover Wright at michellesw@cfpciowa.org. For general information on 1st Five, contact 1st Five state coordinator Sonni Vierling at Sonni.Vierling@idph.iowa.gov.
When a health provider identifies a family need through surveillance or screening, she makes a referral to 1st Five. Of 6,523 needs identified among 4,985 families, 43 percent were for health or developmental concerns, including speech and hearing (blue). Another 40 percent of referrals were connected to family stress and day-to-day resource needs (red). The final 17 percent ranged from caregiver depression and social and behavioral worries to language barriers and parent education needs (green).

After a referral, 1st Five coordinators work with the family to identify resources addressing the family’s needs. Of almost 12,000 connections, 26 percent were for resource needs (blue), 21 percent for family-support services (red), 19 percent for health-related needs (aqua) and 13 percent for early-intervention services (purples). The remaining 18 percent were for dental and mental-health care and other family needs (green).

* Resource-need referrals are for supports such as food, transportation, housing, child care/preschool, energy and baby supplies.
** Health-related referrals are for services such as lead screening, vision, immunizations, hearing assessments, nutrition and care at the Child Health Specialty Clinics.
*** Other referrals are for services like domestic violence support, legal and translation services and resource guides.
Families and providers across Iowa find value in 1st Five

Polk County Family
The family of John, 2 months, was referred to 1st Five for caregiver depression. John’s mother described feelings of loneliness and inadequacy as a parent to a 1st Five care coordinator. She had stopped taking anti-depressant medications. The coordinator offered supportive listening, reviewed counseling options and made a home-visiting referral to VNS of Iowa Healthy Start/Empowerment family-support program. The family is now active in the program and John’s mother is scheduled to begin seeing a counselor.

Taylor County Family
Ben, 4, was referred to 1st Five for a speech concern. Ben lives with his father and 8-year-old sister. The family had recently moved back to the area and was living temporarily with the father’s parents. 1st Five worked with the local AEA to begin speech evaluation for Ben. Through care coordination, he was also enrolled in preschool, and the family connected to WIC, fuel assistance, HUD and the community food bank.

Warren County Family
A family with four young children was referred by their provider for multiple issues, primarily family stress. The family had recently moved and was struggling to meet daily needs. Items had been stolen during a break-in at their home. 1st Five connected the family to community resources that provided food and goods to replace what was stolen.

Dr. Angela Townsend
Covenant Clinic, Waterloo (Black Hawk County)
“For a long time I have felt like my practice was not as comprehensive as I knew it should be. I was doing all I could, but I still felt worried that things were falling through the cracks and kids might be suffering because of it. I can see that (1st Five) is helping me deliver the kind of healthcare that I know kids and families need. ... Once a need is identified there must be a process for identifying additional needs and local resources to address those needs.”

Diane Link, RN Manager
Medical Associate Clinic, Dubuque
“Families have very complex needs ... and we just don’t have time to address all of them in the few minutes we have in the clinic room. These issues are not just for low-income families. All families encounter stress and all families can benefit from extra support.”

Lee County Family
Jordan, 4, was referred to 1st Five by her health provider for aggressive behavior and hearing/speech concerns. Jordan had witnessed her father’s violent and aggressive behavior toward her mother. 1st Five worked with the family to access services at the Tri-State Coalition against Violence, counseling services for Jordan and AEA speech/hearing evaluation. Jordan’s mother reports that Jordan’s behavior has greatly improved. She has also begun counseling herself for domestic violence and is moving ahead with speech and hearing assessments for Jordan’s brother.

The 13 counties participating in 1st Five are shaded. Each blue dot indicates a participating medical practice.