

FOR FAMILIES, A HELPFUL OVERVIEW OF:

Universal Newborn Screening & Support Systems



A Vision for Supporting Each Family's Unique Needs

Regardless of ZIP code or family income, when welcoming a new baby, all parents and families could benefit from additional encouragement and support.

We know it takes a village to raise a child, but in the early weeks and months of a child's life, it can often be difficult for parents to navigate and connect to the various health care, early education and other services and resources they may need and want.

The first three years of a child's life are the most rapid, critical and vulnerable period of development in the entire human lifespan, making those early weeks among the most important for building secure relationships with parents and caregivers and ensuring that families have what they need to support healthy development. At the same time, the early postpartum period represents a vitally sensitive window for screening for critical health risks and supporting the physical and mental health of birthing parents.

Universal Newborn Screening & Support Systems (UNSS): offer and provide voluntary, short-term screening and referral services to every family with a newborn to help connect them to the supportive services and resources they may need and want, at no cost to the family

UNSS approaches may look different in different communities depending on local contexts. Typically, a nurse home visitor, community health worker or other trained professional will connect with families shortly after birth and offer to visit families in their homes at around three weeks following childbirth.

Common Connections Made By UNSS Referrals:



During this visit, the UNSS provider will complete a brief maternal and infant health screening and speak with the family to identify interest in any additional supportive services, including medical care, household needs, early childhood education, emotional supports or other community resources

What the Process May Look Like for You & Your Family:



1. Nurse, community health worker or other trained professional connects with family shortly after birth

2. Provider will visit families in their homes around three weeks following childbirth and once the family is settled

3. Families are connected to community resources and additional supports

Participating in UNSS services does not duplicate or cancel out any of the existing services that families benefit from and choose to participate in, including home visiting, doula, community health worker, primary health care and Early Intervention services.

Instead, UNSS is an entry point and referral system that makes it easier for families to connect to local services and resources and informs local planning by gathering data on what families want and need. Research shows that UNSS helps strengthen families by assessing newborns and new parents for important health risks and ensuring that families have what they need to support the healthy development of their children. Communities also benefit from UNSS because these approaches help improve communication and coordination between local services (infant and maternal health, mental health, early learning, economic supports, etc.).

UNSS may go by many different names, but at its core it represents a system of community support and care for all families with a new baby. While UNSS is not yet available statewide across Illinois, families in communities in Peoria and Stephenson Counties, and many neighborhoods across the City of Chicago, can already take advantage of these services. Through a program called Family Connects, families in these communities will receive an offer to receive a nurse visit at home in the weeks following the birth of a new baby.

The state is working to expand access to UNSS to ensure that all Illinois families get the support they deserve when welcoming a new baby. Family voices and opinions are important to shaping how the state expands UNSS.

"It's just getting that medical support and knowledge and information, but in a comfortable environment. It sounds weird to invite a stranger into your home, but it's just so helpful and encouraging to be able to do it in a comfortable environment where it can be slow paced, where you don't have to worry about leaving your home [...] It's good to know that [universal newborn supports] are there for any mom, no matter where you're at or what your needs are or what your family, financial or family support situation is. But for me, it was just the encouragement of having a nurse come in and say, 'Hey, how are you doing?'"

**SAMANTHA PRICE,
MOM OF FOUR IN PEORIA COUNTY, ILLINOIS WHO
PARTICIPATED IN FAMILY CONNECTS UNIVERSAL
NEWBORN HOME VISITING AFTER ALL FOUR OF HER
BIRTHS**

