

The Yolo Way – A Community Comes Together to Address the Perinatal Crisis for our Most Vulnerable Families

The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the challenges for Yolo County's most vulnerable families, creating a perinatal crisis with delayed prenatal care, high-risk pregnancies, low birth weight, and two-thirds of mothers suffering from clinical depression.

When the Yolo County Board of Supervisors requested proposals to allocate American Rescue Plan (ARP) funds to address the crisis, one proposal – First 5 Yolo's Welcome Baby – met and exceeded the goals for ARP funds. Welcome Baby leverages a community.

"My colleagues and I realized the immediate impact and benefit the Welcome Baby program would have for Yolo County's most vulnerable families," said Board Chair, Supervisor Angel Barajas. "The ARP funds combined with the partnerships of First 5 Yolo, CommuniCare Health Centers, Yolo County Children's Alliance, and local medical providers leverage our resources to assist a crisis in perinatal and postpartum care."

Yolo County set key priorities for ARP funds. Public Health programs had to demonstrate a nexus to the pandemic, fill pre-existing gaps, make direct impacts, and speed recovery from the effects of the pandemic.

First 5 Yolo developed Welcome Baby (WB) and coordinated with service providers at point of care, like CommuniCare (CCHC), Yolo County Children's Alliance, Northern California Children's Therapy Center, Sutter Health, and other local medical providers. WB is currently in launch phase, with connections from CommuniCare Perinatal Clinics and Sutter Labor and Delivery already occurring.

"First 5 Yolo expects Welcome Baby to create both immediate and long-term benefits to newborns, families, healthcare systems, and the community," said First 5 Yolo Executive Director Gina Daleiden. "It's inspiring to see the collaborative effort to build and launch this innovative program, and the response has been even greater than anticipated as parents are readily accepting the Welcome Baby services they need and deserve."

WB provides home visits at critical points for every Yolo County baby born with public insurance or uninsured. Hospitals offer connection to WB at point of labor and delivery, and families are enrolled prenatally through health care providers or direct referral. Families enrolled receive up to three "Welcome Baby" home visits. One by a registered nurse within the first weeks of returning home from the hospital and up to two visits by community healthcare workers from The CHILD Project: Road to Resilience (R2R) Healthy Families America trained Family Resource Specialists during the following postpartum weeks.

Families in greatest need are then offered enrollment in more intensive home visiting services through R2R or other existing home visiting programs, while some families will receive referrals to additional community resources, as appropriate.

Programs must maximize opportunity. Yolo County allocated \$2 million to Welcome Baby, with Proposition 10 funding from First 5 Yolo and in-kind support from First 5 Yolo through its F5 CA Home

Visiting Coordination Grant. The City of Davis also allocated \$300,000 to fund Welcome Baby, and requests for funding contributions are pending with the City of Woodland and the City of West Sacramento.

First 5 Yolo is also a leadership partner on UC Davis' CA State Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) Aware Grant along with Yolo County Children's Alliance (YCCA), CCHC, Winter Health Care, and others. The ACEs Aware grant expands and streamlines screening and the connection of health care providers to community networks of care to prevent and mitigate ACEs. The screening coordinates with Help Me Grow (a program funded by F5Y and County Mental Health Services Act), a key systems integration for early childhood mental health.

Projects must strive for transformational goals. For example, Welcome Baby reaches families at the earliest point to strategically coordinate flow into available services and support medical, mental health, and other essential care that has lapsed during the pandemic.

All eligible newborns and their families are offered the services, either prenatally or at the birthing hospital, fundamentally improving access to critical mitigations for pandemic-related impacts to health and development. This approach helps to de-stigmatize screening, care, and service access, leverages existing resources, and creates a transformative early identification, home visiting, and early childhood system of care in Yolo County.

Together – community-based organizations, funding, health, mental health, partners, programs, and services – can meet this unprecedented crisis, set the developmental trajectory of Yolo County's youngest children towards reaching their full potential, and strengthen Yolo County families and communities for years to come.