Family Connects is an innovative community-wide nurse home visiting program for parents of newborns implemented in the four Transformation Zone counties in northeastern North Carolina (Beaufort, Bertie, Chowan and Hyde) supported by N.C.’s Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge grant. Working through local health departments, and county leadership and implementation teams, the program is intended to identify and support family needs in one to three home visits within 12 weeks after birth. Nurse home visitors provide support and education about newborn and postpartum care, assess family risks and needs, and triage needs to appropriate and acceptable community services, providing the backbone for the community’s system of care in early childhood. Family Connects is the first replication of the promising evidence-based program, Durham Connects, implemented in Durham County, N.C.

The services include an integrated home visit at approximately three weeks post hospital discharge, assessment of family wellbeing and needs, supportive guidance on topics common to all families with newborns (e.g., feeding, sleep), follow-up visits, and linkages to community resources, as needed. The program consists of several scripted intervention contacts, including:

1. Scheduling during the hospital birthing visit when a home visiting nurse communicates the importance of community support for parenting
2. 1-3 nurse home visits between 3-12 weeks of infant age

The Family Connects program goals are consistent with those of other maltreatment prevention home visiting programs:

1. To connect with the mother/family to support and enhance skills and self-confidence
2. To connect families with community services in areas assessed during the home visit(s). The home visit is a “gateway” to community referrals and resources to enhance overall family well-being
3. 1-2 nurse contacts with a community service provider when needs are identified
4. A staff-member telephone or home follow-up one month after case closure

With parental consent, the nurse home visitor communicates by telephone and letters to maternal and infant health providers to ensure continuity in care.

The Center for Child and Family Policy at Duke University conducted an independent evaluation using interview comparisons between families eligible for Family Connects relative to those who had newborns prior to the implementation of the program. Below is a summary of preliminary results available to date; these findings represent a beginning subset of the full evaluation that will be available by the end of 2016.

- Relative to the comparison group, Family Connects families accessed 10 percent more community resources
- Family Connects mothers were 32 percent more likely to be breastfeeding their infant at the time of the evaluation interview
- Family Connects infants were 37 percent less likely to be exposed to household tobacco smoking
- Among infants younger than six months, Family Connects mothers were more likely to report that their infants were sleeping on their backs
- Family Connects infants utilized 26 percent less emergency medical care since hospital discharge, including 24 percent fewer urgent care or emergency department visits, and 50 percent fewer overnights in the hospital
- Relative to mothers in the comparison group, Family Connects mothers reported 69 percent fewer hospital overnight stays for themselves since the infants’ births

**Family risk and needs by county in the Transformation Zone implementing Family Connects**

- Beaufort = 58 percent of families had needs requiring referrals for community services; 41 percent had specific needs for education/support for mild risk factors.
- Bertie = 57 percent of families had needs requiring referrals for community services; 43 percent had specific needs for education/support for mild risk factors.
- Chowan = 41 percent of families had needs requiring referrals for community services; 58 percent had specific needs for education/support for mild risk factors.
- Hyde = 46 percent of families had needs requiring referrals for community services; 51 percent had specific needs for education/support for mild risk factors.

(Note that very few families reported no needs for education or further intervention)

More information about Family Connects can be found at: [www.familyconnectsnc.org](http://www.familyconnectsnc.org)