

Best Beginnings

Developmental • Autism • Social-Emotional • Maternal Depression Screening
An ACHIA Early Screening and Referral Collaborative

Unaddressed developmental delays, behavioral issues, and postpartum depression may adversely affect child health outcomes. The nine health supervision visits in the first two years of life are opportunities for pediatric primary care providers to identify these conditions and refer families to timely resources. Unfortunately, even when needs are identified and families are referred, specialist visits often remain 'unscheduled and unattended,' leading to persistent care gaps.

January - November 2020

Global Aim

We will build a sustainable patient-centered quality improvement infrastructure for best beginnings within our practice where children at risk for developmental, autism and/or social/emotional concerns, as well as mothers with post-partum depression, are identified through recommended screening and are appropriately referred for services.

Specific Aim

Between January and September 2020 we will increase the rate at which recommended well-visit screening and referrals for conditions impacting children ages one month to three years are reliably screened and, if at risk, are referred for services:

- 90% of well visits ages one month - three years appropriately complete selected early screening*
- 90% of children or mothers identified as at risk have a follow-up plan documented
- The percentage of children or mothers at risk who complete follow-up plan

Screens (select one)

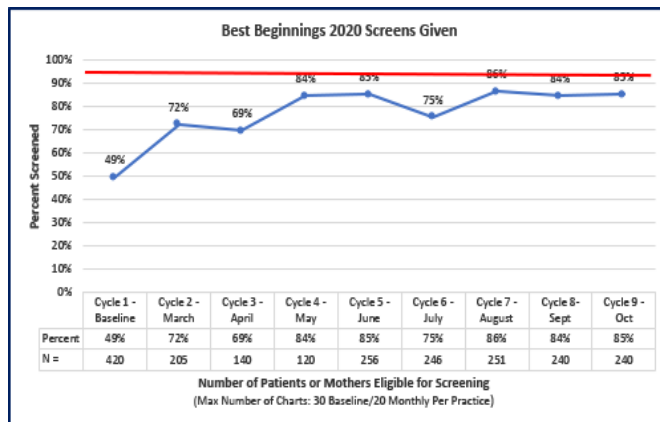
- Development: 9, 18, and 30 (or 24) months
- Autism: 18 and 24 months
- Post-partum Depression: 1, 2, 4 and 6 months
- Social-Emotional: Practice Identified Age

*Appropriately complete:

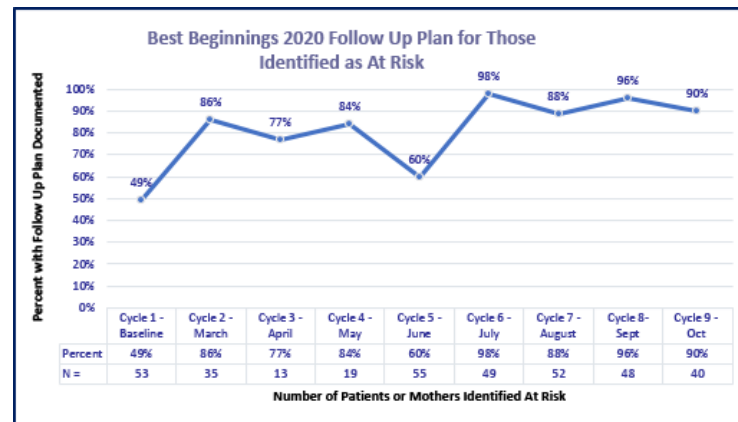
- Screen scored accurately in appropriate language
- Development and Social-Emotional: Correct age screen deployed
- Autism and Maternal Depression: Follow-up questions administered when indicated

COVID Pause -- From March-May collaborative work "paused" as practices addressed COVID needs. Monthly interactive webinars allowed practices to share tips for schedule revisions, COVID testing, rolling out telehealth, and obtaining personal protective equipment. Several practices continued to track and enter data.

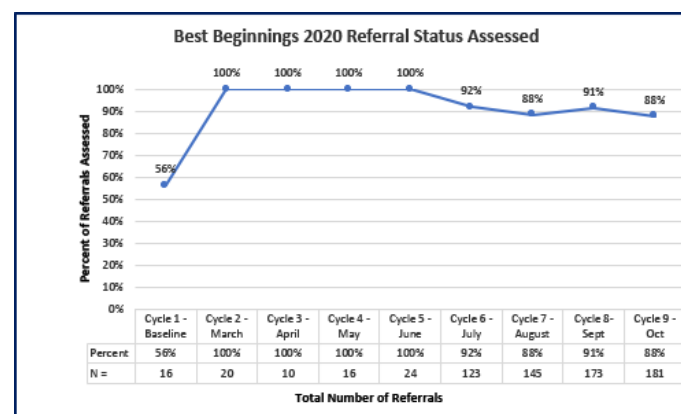
Measures



The Best Beginnings Screen measure assesses multiple components to ensure the accuracy of the screen interpretation. Practices began the collaborative with half of recommended screens appropriately completed and quickly implemented screening for around 85% of visits. Improvements most commonly noted were reliably completing the screen and scoring the screen accurately.



Practices began the collaborative with 50% of their patients or at-risk mothers having a documented follow-up plan and quickly implemented reliable documentation.



Referral gaps exist when a patient at risk is referred for services, but the appointment is not completed.

Measuring the desired outcome of referral completion has little utility for making improvements in a 9-month collaborative as referrals may require months to complete.

This innovative measure tracked all referrals made during the collaborative. For a referral to count as "assessed," the appointment was completed OR scheduled for a future date.

The run chart follows the predicted pattern. Early in the collaborative when few referrals were made (especially in the pandemic), most appointments were scheduled and therefore "assessed" as 100%. Over time, as families missed appointments, referral tracking helped the practices identify and address the barriers to referral completion.

Participants

14 practices from across Alabama with 95 total staff:

- 64 physicians
- 17 nursing/clinical
- 11 administrative/ support

11 practices remained in the extended collaborative while navigating the pandemic

Project Partners

- Help Me Grow
- Reach Out and Read-Alabama
- Regional Autism Network
- Alabama Chapter-American Academy of Pediatrics

Project Support

- Children's of Alabama
- University of Alabama - Department of Pediatrics
- University of South Alabama
- The Caring Foundation
- Alabama Medicaid Agency
- ALL Kids
- Alabama Department of Early Childhood Education

Practice panels annually have:

- 93,389 well visits 0 - 3 years
- 237,540 total visits ages birth - 18 years
- 41.06% of participating practice patients have Medicaid

Best Beginnings faculty came from across the state:

- Developmental Delay and Autism: Justin Schwartz, MD, FAAP, UAB Developmental-Behavior Pediatrics Birmingham, Alabama
- Social-Emotional Screening: Elizabeth Dawson, MD, FAAP, Charles Henderson Child Health Center, Troy, Alabama
- Postpartum Depression Screening: Lamenda Blakeney, MD, FAAP, Partners in Pediatrics, Montgomery, Alabama
- Family Representative: Susan Pannell

LESSONS LEARNED

- Learning collaboratives provide practices structure to make desired improvements challenging to prioritize and develop outside the collaborative.
- Practices value interacting with other primary care providers to bring novel ideas to their clinic. Bouncing ideas off of each other was especially useful during COVID to address the rapid changes around scheduling, supplies, and telehealth.
- Working as a team is essential to improve diagnoses, referrals, tracking, and communication with families.
- Multiple practices identified referral-tracking improvements as the most impactful change to connect those at risk to needed services in a timely manner.
- Our community partners were highly utilized in this collaborative. Practices especially valued Help Me Grow's assistance in closing Early Intervention referral gaps and their support in transitioning off Early Intervention at 3 years of age.



For more information on this and other collaboratives, visit www.achia.org.

Participating Practices: Dothan Healthcare Network -- Dothan Pediatric Clinic, Enterprise Pediatric Clinic, Eufaula Pediatric Clinic, Ozark Pediatric Clinic; Greenvale Pediatrics - Brook Highland; Heritage Pediatrics; Huntsville Pediatric Associates; Infants' and Children's Clinic, P.C.; Midtown Pediatrics; Partners in Pediatrics; Pediatrics West Bessemer; Pediatrics West McAdory; UAB Pediatric Primary Care Clinic