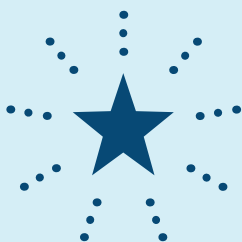


PATIENT EXPERIENCE INSIGHTS FROM THE C4SEN INVESTMENT PROGRAM

SEPTEMBER 2026

Between 2021 and 2023, the Massachusetts Health Policy Commission (HPC) administered the Cost-effective, Coordinated Care for Caregivers and Substance Exposed Newborns (C4SEN) investment program. C4SEN provided funds for five hospitals to implement initiatives providing wraparound services through at least 12 months postpartum and improving care quality for infants exposed to substances in utero and their birth parents. C4SEN patient experience data highlighted several highly valuable elements that helped drive participant engagement in the program and positive perception of its benefits. Collecting and analyzing patient experience data was particularly important for the C4SEN investment program and its goal of delivering care without stigma and bias, especially for participants with substance use disorder (SUD), a population that often reports stigmatizing experiences in the health care system. Understanding the program offerings that shaped patient experience may help other health systems working with this population to structure their services, staff, and approach to align with those elements that have the greatest impact for participants. Among the factors influencing positive experience, C4SEN participants most frequently mentioned accessible and nonjudgmental staff, connection to resources, free baby products, and social support/support groups as some of the strengths of the C4SEN investment program. These responses pointed to participants valuing the non-medical and patient-centered support offered by the hospitals in addition to support with medical care and SUD recovery. For more information about the C4SEN investment program and findings from the patient experience evaluation, please see the C4SEN evaluation report.

Overall satisfaction
was high with
96%
of survey respondents
“very” or “somewhat”
satisfied with the
program overall, and
84%
“very likely”
to return to the program
if needed in the future.



- ▶ **BAYSTATE FRANKLIN MEDICAL CENTER,**
Engaging Mothers for Positive Outcomes through
Early Referrals+ (EMPOWER+)
- ▶ **BERKSHIRE MEDICAL CENTER,**
Berkshire Connections
- ▶ **MERCY MEDICAL CENTER,** Mothers and Newborns’
Treatment and Recovery Alignment (MANTRA)¹
- ▶ **SOUTHCOST HEALTH,**
New Beginnings Community Outreach Program
- ▶ **SOUTH SHORE HOSPITAL,** Supporting: Hope,
Opportunity, Resilience, Empowerment (SHORE)

¹ Mercy Medical Center had a shortened implementation period and data from this program is not reflected in this publication.

ACCESSIBLE, NONJUDGMENTAL STAFF

C4SEN program participants shared their deep appreciation for the ways in which staff provided support and built trusting relationships. Staff met participants where they were in their recovery journey and created space for them to articulate their care and treatment goals. They shared the importance of not making assumptions about participants' desires for their recovery and letting participants lead. Patients also valued that many program staff were flexible with their schedules, in some cases even making themselves available outside of work hours as needed. By serving as accessible and non-judgmental advocates and empathetic listeners, staff fostered deep and sustained participant engagement.



CONCEPTS IN ACTION

When Berkshire Connections, a C4SEN program based at Berkshire Health System, was building out their team, they sought out candidates for the program coordinator role who had lived experience of opioid use disorder (OUD), pregnancy, and parenting. The Berkshire Connections team knew the important perspective that this profile would bring when working with the program population. Participants had the opportunity to connect with someone who understood their experiences and was able to approach them with openness and a lack of judgment. Other Berkshire providers often sought the program coordinator's perspective when working with pregnant or parenting participants with OUD to ensure that their approach to care was appropriate and trauma informed. The program coordinator shaped the care model and influenced the organizational culture in ways that made staff more attuned to the unique needs of the target population.

PARTICIPANT PERSPECTIVES

"[The staff are] just really great women and, besides advocating, there's no stereotype from them that comes along with someone like me. They made it very comfortable ... Even to this day, if I feel like I need something or anything, I can contact them, and they'll help in any way they can."

—BERKSHIRE CONNECTIONS PARTICIPANT

"They were just very kind no matter who you are, they were just there ...Regardless of anyone's situation or what they've been through or what they are going through, they were always there with an open ear and they were very non-judgmental, super understanding of whatever it is, and they were very wonderful to me."

—NEW BEGINNINGS PARTICIPANT

"[My advocate], she never made it hard for me. She always made it easier. I cannot do that, she would pick another day, she would do something else, you know? I'm the type of person, if I don't like it, I'll drop very fast, right? ... And I've been staying in this program since the start. I never dropped, because [my advocate], she's very nice. She makes it easy... she never gives me a hard time. She always connects me, you know?"

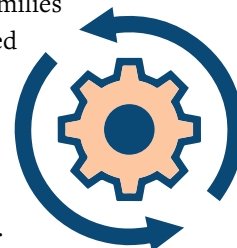
—NEW BEGINNINGS PARTICIPANT

"Having something that ... is conducive to my life and my recovery is nice and it's refreshing because it's really hard to establish relationships and trust ... They try to make it work so they can stay a part of our progress and our life and our story and be there to support [us]. And I think that's what's really helped me gain a lot of the trust that I have for them and have such a positive outlook on the services, because they really have just stayed consistent and that hasn't happened a lot in my story."

—BERKSHIRE CONNECTIONS PARTICIPANT

CONNECTION TO RESOURCES

Program participants appreciated that program staff served as a “one-stop shop” for necessary referrals and social support needs. In some cases, program staff helped participants get appointments for psychotherapy, coordinated placements in residential recovery programs or supportive living communities, and organized participants’ documentation and services ahead of case reviews with the Massachusetts Department of Children and Families (DCF). Programs also often connected participants to birthing and parenting classes, and helped with sign-ups for Women, Infants, Children (WIC) or Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) food benefits. They also helped participants navigate transportation challenges in getting to various appointments, and other needs that might have affected the participants’ pregnancy, recovery, or parenting. Participants found this helpful, as they did not have to engage with multiple programs and build relationships with a number of care coordinators to get all of these needs met.



CONCEPTS IN ACTION

South Shore Hospital’s SHORE program provided a wide range of potential services to participants. In addition to behavioral health services, the program supported health-related social needs, working across a large variety of service providers in their hospital’s catchment area. SHORE brought new services in-house to their program by working with a doula to provide birth and postpartum classes and connecting participants to safe sleep supplies. They also sought additional training for staff so they could offer additional therapy modalities, lactation support, and motivational interviewing to support behavior change to participants.

PARTICIPANT PERSPECTIVES

“The most valuable thing was knowing again, that if I did need something, that there are options, there are resources there to help if I was in a situation that I did need help ... they’re willing to help you regardless of your background or what it is you’ve been through ... I thought that was very nice.”

—NEW BEGINNINGS PARTICIPANT

“I think they would’ve done just about anything or put me into hands that could help me access just about anything that I needed as far as assistance financially, socially, anything, which is huge because that’s not something that you come across often, a blanket kind of [support].”

—SHORE PARTICIPANT

“They’ve been there for me for anything I’ve needed ... I really appreciate it, everything that they have done ... The program I’m in and the program that I was in before this one is because of them. I probably never would’ve found the place that I’m at right now if it wasn’t for them.”

—NEW BEGINNINGS PARTICIPANT

BABY GOODS

Many participants in the C4SEN program had high levels of social need and limited financial resources. Program teams often provided items to their participants, including diapers, strollers, car seats, and winter coats. Providing these items was part of the C4SEN wraparound care that prioritized holistically supporting families. Some programs partnered with local organizations to obtain baby items, while others used program budgets or philanthropic support, and teams took a variety of approaches to distributing the items to the participants that needed them. One program brought a basket of baby goods to participants when visiting them at the hospital after delivery, which participants found not only helpful, but also very meaningful.



CONCEPTS IN ACTION

Southcoast Health's New Beginnings team expanded their partnerships under C4SEN and used funds to provide baby supplies to their enrolled patients. This proved especially important when, amid nationwide shortages of baby formula, they were able to coordinate formula and breastmilk deliveries for patients. New Beginnings worked with a local organization called "Gifts to Give" to arrange baby supply gifts for participants in their programs. Staff would arrange these items in a gift basket and often hand-deliver them to create a moment of connection, support, and celebration. Staff found this so essential they built space into their new offices for New Beginnings (opened after the C4SEN program ended) to store baby supplies to ensure they could provide these to every parent in their program.

PARTICIPANT PERSPECTIVES

"They gave those baskets, but to me, it was more of a meaning. It could have been a card, but it's the point that they came and showed me that they cared. That's what really meant the most to me."

—NEW BEGINNINGS PARTICIPANT

"I would say when I had the baby, it was a complete shock. The director came in with two laundry baskets full of stuff for the baby which I literally broke down and cried because I didn't have much. So that was really helpful."

—NEW BEGINNINGS PARTICIPANT

"When I was in the hospital, they even brought me these two huge baskets of baby stuff and I was shocked. I was like, 'I can't believe these two people that I don't even really know, they brought me these two beautiful baskets of diapers and clothes ... I was in the hospital by myself mostly, and I didn't have any family that stopped by, so they were pretty much the visitors that I had ... I used all of what they had given, so it made me feel really nice.'"

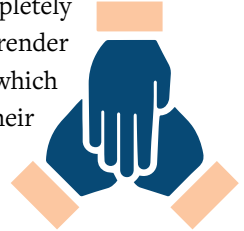
—NEW BEGINNINGS PARTICIPANT

"Right before the baby was born, they helped with a voucher to get her clothes, a bassinet, bottles, anything I could think of for the baby that I didn't have. I still get diapers and wipes from them occasionally, and they are just extremely supportive and awesome."

—BERKSHIRE CONNECTIONS PARTICIPANT

SUPPORT GROUPS AND SOCIAL SUPPORT

As they began implementation of the programs, hospitals realized the importance of ensuring participants had access to social support tailored to their unique situation as pregnant or new parents with SUD or in recovery. The experiences of parenting and of SUD recovery intersected in specific ways, which staff observed were not always adequately addressed by existing support groups. Staff also noted that participants may not feel completely comfortable in support groups generally focused on parenting or on SUD recovery, which might render them less effective. Programs built connections to – or established their own – support groups to which they could refer their patients. Berkshire Connections and South Shore specifically implemented their own support groups targeting the intersection of parenting while in recovery. Participants noted that these spaces were valuable to help them connect to others with whom they could share their challenges, celebrate their successes, and seek advice.



CONCEPTS IN ACTION

Berkshire Connections offered a weekly support group and provided participants with food and childcare so they could more easily attend. In some cases, the program team helped to coordinate transportation to support group meetings. Program staff knew it was important for participants to have a support group tailored to their specific pregnancy and parenting experiences. For some participants, the support group served as a new, safe community for those who may have become isolated due to moving or cutting ties to old connections or friends who were still actively using opioids or other substances.

PARTICIPANT PERSPECTIVES

“[It was] just a really good support system to be able to have other women that had recently had babies and were going through the same things I was going through. It’s nice to be part of almost like a family that understands you... they’re all on the same journey.”

-BERKSHIRE CONNECTIONS PARTICIPANT

“If you ever have questions, there’s a group of people that are right there that get it or that are going through the same things or are just like-minded people. It’s nice to know that if you need it, there’s that support group.”

-BERKSHIRE CONNECTIONS PARTICIPANT

“It’s a great group of people and I think it’s awesome, honestly ... The fact that they have childcare really helps too. Honestly, I wish that there were more groups like that.”

- BERKSHIRE CONNECTIONS PARTICIPANT

“Other participants and children can come, and they do food and... we all talk about our ups, our downs ... [O]ne of the people that work in the program [is] actually a [person in recovery] herself, and they give us resources and updates on things in the community for us.”

- BERKSHIRE CONNECTIONS PARTICIPANT