

### Overview

St. Peter's Health, a non-profit health system in Helena, Montana, serves over 97,000 residents across five counties. The system encompasses a 99-bed acute care hospital, a behavioral health unit, outpatient clinics and much more. In 2017, the rise of perinatal mood and anxiety disorders, such as depression, postpartum psychosis and postpartum PTSD, prompted St. Peter's Health to recognize gaps in postpartum care.

In Montana, over 42% of mothers reported having symptoms of postpartum depression. Many new moms do not receive any outreach from caregivers until their six-week postpartum appointment, delaying early identification and treatment of stressors leading to perinatal mood and anxiety disorders and substance use in parents and families.

To address this gap, St. Peter's Health created an evidence based parental support program, Taking Care of You. The four-year program has grown from one nurse care manager to a team of specially trained registered nurse (RN) care managers, behavioral health professionals and social workers, who work alongside providers, to connect patients and their families with community resources to support their needs. It administers the Edinburgh screening to assess parents for perinatal mood and anxiety disorders two weeks postpartum. The assessment identifies symptoms, such as feelings of guilt, anger and sadness, as well as risk factors like history of depression, lack of a support system and financial stress. Recognizing that there are many socioeconomic and environmental factors that shape one's health and well-being, the program offers support services, professional help and referrals for moms and their families experiencing depression, anxiety, tobacco, alcohol or drug use, stress, grief/loss and challenges with social needs such as housing, transportation and food.



St. Peter's Health partners with the Healthy Mothers, Healthy Babies, the Montana Coalition Inc., which helps research and create a resource and referral network for providers to readily connect parents with community-based resources and support systems. The coalition also advocates for better maternal care within the community and in hospitals, and supports workforce development by training health care professionals to better identify and address perinatal mood and anxiety disorders.

### Impact

Since 2020, Taking Care of You served more than 300 patients, connecting them with services within St. Peter's Health and the community. The program receives weekly messages of gratitude and appreciation from patients for helping them understand and navigate the postpartum period.

Healthy Mothers, Healthy Babies, the Montana Coalition Inc., and St. Peter's Health together have raised awareness in moms and in the community about conditions, stressors and complications women, fathers

and families experience for at least a whole year after a birth. It enables the care team to lead and engage in continuous postpartum care and emphasized the importance of forming wraparound support systems for those who need it. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the coalition virtually trained nearly 500 health care professionals statewide on maternal and perinatal mental health and is exploring extending the training to pediatricians.

Taking Care of You also partnered with Montana Department of Public Health and Human Service Child and Family Services Division to keep families healthy and together. CFSD refers clients who are pregnant or have a baby under a year of age and experiencing perinatal mood and anxiety disorders and other associated needs. The Taking Care of You team works with the referred patients for a year or until a support system has been established. Through this partnership, mothers who have completed their treatment plan have been reunited with their children.

## Lessons Learned

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Initially the program experienced challenges in encouraging women with depression, anxiety or other mood disorders to seek therapy or attend a consult. “If you are stressed about your housing or where your food is coming from, your brain just cannot be in the space to heal and receive those high-level mental health services,” said Kelsey Kyle, RN case manager. Following a program shift to encompass the social determinants of health and patients’ social needs, many patients successfully connected with resources to meet their nonmedical needs. This success increased trust between providers and patients and alleviated stress, resulting in patients finding capacity to seek mental health services.

St. Peter’s Health also fostered many partnerships with community organizations and members to gather and connect patients with resources. “We work together as a community team. It can’t be one person doing this, it has to be an entire network of systems,” added Kyle.

## Future Goals

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Through its Take Care of You program, St. Peter’s Health hopes to reduce stigma associated with voicing and experiencing perinatal mood and anxiety disorders. Additionally, “we want to create a place for survivors at the table to help make decisions and advocate for policies supporting better mental health, shared Brie MacLaurin, executive director of Healthy Mothers, Healthy Babies, the Montana Coalition Inc. On the horizon, St. Peter’s Health aims to create and offer wraparound support and services beyond one year postpartum because ages 0 to 5 are critical in early childhood development.

## Contact

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