

The Nurture Programme – Infant Health and Wellbeing

Making Every Contact Count

The Nurture Programme – Infant Health and Wellbeing is a new programme of work designed to improve the information and professional supports that the HSE provide to parents during pregnancy and the first three years of their baby's life. It is a partnership between the HSE, the Atlantic Philanthropies, the Katharine Howard Foundation and the Centre for Effective Services.

On average 70,000 babies are born in Ireland every year – that is a baby every 7 ½ minutes. All parents want what is best for their child and need support from everyone around them to achieve that. The Nurture Programme is being established with these babies and their parents at its heart. The aim of the Programme is to support parents and healthcare professionals in their respective roles of parenting and service provision. From pregnancy through to the child's third birthday, parents, on average, will meet a healthcare professional at least 25 times. The Nurture Programme will focus on the relationship between healthcare professionals and parents. The Programme will build on the best practice already in place and ensure that this practice is delivered consistently across all our services. It will take an evidence-based approach to develop and improve services on an ongoing basis.

John Hennessy, HSE National Director for Primary Care said, "The relationship between our healthcare professionals and parents is the focus of The Nurture Programme. We want to make every contact count in developing happy, healthy children raised by parents who feel empowered, knowledgeable and supported through their contacts with healthcare staff."

Dr. Stephanie O'Keeffe, HSE National Director of Health & Wellbeing said, "Under the Nurture Programme we will build a universal, consistent, sustainable national approach to the delivery of quality services for all infants and their families."

Noelle Spring, Director of the Katharine Howard Foundation said "The Nurture Programme is an exciting opportunity for us to work in partnership in order to deliver real and lasting changes to the lives of our very youngest children. These changes will impact positively on the whole of their lives."

Mary Sutton, Country Director for The Atlantic Philanthropies added "This grant completes a cycle of investment by Atlantic which, since 2004, has invested over €111 million in Ireland, supporting the transformation of children's services in favour of prevention and early intervention. As we conclude, our focus is on developing a wider footprint within mainstream systems. This partnership with KHF, the HSE and CES presents an exciting opportunity to deliver improved outcomes from the universal health and wellbeing services that are provided to parents and their babies."

The Nurture Programme will work on the development of a new child health & wellbeing website, for parents and for healthcare staff. This will be the trusted source for all health and wellbeing information that parents, and health care professionals, need. Universal access will be provided to the Child Safety Awareness Programme to guard against accidental deaths and unintentional injuries to babies and infants. Infant Mental Health will be promoted, covering topics like bonding with your baby, parent-child communication and supporting your baby's early learning and development. Additional supports will be provided to mothers to breastfeed whenever possible and evidence-based information on all aspects of infant feeding and nutrition will be promoted.

In conclusion, John Hennessey said “Our plan is that The Nurture Programme will make positive and sustainable changes in the way the HSE supports parents through pregnancy and their children’s youngest years.”