

January 2026



Case Study: HealthySteps in Arkansas

Health care and education leaders in Arkansas support children's healthy development statewide through pediatric clinics.

What was the problem?

In 2019, Arkansas ranked [40th out of 50 states on child well-being measures](#), including health and educational outcomes. Importantly, families in Arkansas needed evidence-based solutions to improve preventive health care in early life. Research shows that the healthy development of young children (3 years old and younger) is crucial to positive outcomes later in life, and one especially powerful way to support healthy development is to provide support to families where they are most likely to access it—the pediatric primary care office. Pediatric practices can adopt evidence-based interventions designed to complement pediatric care: screening children for physical and behavioral health issues, connecting families to resources, and supporting caregivers.

What was accomplished?

The Arkansas Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics (ARAAP), the nonprofit Excel by Eight (E8), and the Arkansas Children's Care Network (ACCN) collaborated to bring **HealthySteps** to Arkansas in 2022. HealthySteps is a program of ZERO TO THREE that adds specialist capacity to pediatric primary care teams to foster nurturing parenting and healthy development for babies and toddlers. ARAAP also collaborated with Arkansas Medicaid, state legislators, and the HealthySteps National Office to pass and implement [Act 513 of 2023](#), which enabled Arkansas Medicaid to reimburse for pediatric practice transformation models for the first time.

27,171

[children aged 0–3 reached](#)
through seven HealthySteps
sites across the state (2025)

4,200+

[referrals](#) for maternal depression,
food insecurity, and other health
and life supports (2022–2024)

218%

estimated [return for
every Medicaid dollar](#)
invested in the program

ARAAP, E8, ACCN, the University of Arkansas Medical School, and the HealthySteps National Office continue to work on expanding the model across the state.

What role did philanthropy play?

- **Promoted collaboration and strategy.** A national funder provided a \$1 million grant over three years to help ARAAP, E8, and ACCN develop a coordinated strategy to bring HealthySteps to the state. Leaders shared that this funding of collaborative strategy work was especially catalytic, enabling the successful launch of HealthySteps in the state and the subsequent passage of Act 513.
- **Funded initial costs of implementation and continued expansion.** Regional foundations and local health systems—the Blue & You Foundation, the Walmart Foundation, and Arkansas Children's—contributed a total of approximately \$2.2 million to fund start-up costs, including specialist salaries, site training, and data system upgrades, at seven initial sites. Health system investment and continued philanthropic funding are supporting start-up costs for nine additional sites, while federal grant funding is supporting three more sites (approximately \$90,000 per site). (A 2022 grant from the US Department of Health and Human Services to the University of Arkansas Medical School also helped.)

- **Promoted sustainability through advocacy and education.** Philanthropic funding enabled ARAAP and E8 to conduct advocacy and education work (501(c)(3) funding) that helped develop HealthySteps champions in pediatric practices, among state legislators, and within Arkansas Medicaid, while ARAAP and the Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation funded lobbying (501(c)(4) funding). This ultimately led to the Medicaid reimbursement win, increasing the financial sustainability of HealthySteps sites without additional grant funding. The HealthySteps National Office continues to fund advocacy efforts to increase Medicaid payment and secure reimbursement from commercial insurers for HealthySteps in Arkansas.

What were the key milestones?

The launch of HealthySteps in Arkansas catalyzed public investment and program expansion in less than five years.

- **2019** Several community organizations sought to bring HealthySteps to Arkansas to address below-average child well-being outcomes. ARAAP and E8 began to build interest in HealthySteps among pediatric partners, including Arkansas Children's and practices in their affiliated care network (i.e., ACCN).
- **2020–21** ARAAP, E8, and ACCN collaborated on planning to implement HealthySteps at seven initial sites. ACCN worked together with the HealthySteps National Office to establish the sites and develop a comprehensive data system to capture outcomes.
- **2022** As initial sites adopted the model, the Arkansas legislature created a working group focused on mental health. ARAAP and E8 participated in this group, contracting with the HealthySteps National Office to help create educational materials and an advocacy approach. ARAAP and the HealthySteps National Office met with Arkansas Medicaid to advocate for an enhanced payment for this type of program, while E8 and ARAAP met with officials in the governor's office to educate decision makers on the HealthySteps model.
- **2023** ARAAP successfully collaborated with Arkansas Medicaid, the HealthySteps National Office, and state legislators to draft and pass Act 513 of 2023, which requires Medicaid reimbursement for pediatric practice transformation models. This increased the interest in implementing HealthySteps, as providers receive a supplemental payment from Medicaid for each child they serve.
- **2024 to present** ARAAP, ACCN, and the HealthySteps National Office continue to seek greater reimbursement for the program to cover families with private insurance in addition to those with Medicaid. The three groups are working with the Arkansas Center for Health Improvement to conduct a return on investment and outcome evaluation of HealthySteps, which is needed to increase the Medicaid reimbursement rate. They are also in talks with commercial insurers about implementing a payment for HealthySteps services.

How was this achieved?

Sustained impact for families across the state resulted from:

COORDINATED EFFORT	COMPELLING CASE	LOCAL CHAMPIONS	PUBLIC FUNDING
Unified efforts of ARAAP, E8, and ACCN drew on the capabilities of each organization to secure grant funding and support site implementation.	The HealthySteps evidence base presented a compelling case for investment, grounded in both child outcomes and potential cost savings.	ARAAP and E8 used their strong ties to decision makers—including the governor's office and Arkansas Medicaid—to pass Act 513 of 2023.	Medicaid reimbursement incentivized pediatric practices to adopt HealthySteps, increasing demand for the model statewide.

Who made it happen?

A diverse, cross-sector coalition contributed to the effort's success, each bringing unique assets and roles:

ANCHOR ORGANIZATIONS	PARTNERS ACROSS MULTIPLE SECTORS
<p>Arkansas Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics (ARAAP)</p> <p>Excel by Eight (E8)</p> <p>Arkansas Children's Care Network (ACCN)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arkansas Medicaid and state legislators who worked with ARAAP on Act 513 • The HealthySteps National Office at ZERO TO THREE, which continues to support policy work and bring best practices from across the country • Local and national funders who continue to support the anchor organizations' efforts and HealthySteps launch/expansion • Pediatric practices that adopted HealthySteps and served families directly