



Los Angeles Best Babies Collaborative
Building Blocks for Better Babies
A Program of First 5 LA

Los Angeles Best Babies Collaborative

First 5 LA: Healthy Births Initiative

Approach 2

Community Building



Approach (2)

Community Building

Goal: To improve pregnancy and birth outcomes through community building.

Objectives:

- To strengthen community infrastructure for promoting healthy births, and
 - To change community norms and increase social capital for promoting healthy births
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Rationale

Much as it takes a village to raise a child, it takes a community to promote healthy births. The literature review suggests that there are many neighborhood and community factors that impact birth outcomes, including residential segregation, neighborhood violence, social capital or social networks, and environmental pollution. With respect to perinatal health, HBLC members reported that the following issues impact healthy births: access to services, lack of transportation, cultural competency and the lack of community resources to name a few. Improving clinical screening for maternal depression will have limited impact if mental health services are not available in the community. Similarly, the lack of shelter beds or infrastructure support in the community for battered pregnant women serves as an important deterrent to routine screening for intimate partner violence. The objective of this strategy is to use the Healthy Births Initiative to build the infrastructure needed in the community to promote healthy births and to leave a lasting legacy throughout Los Angeles County. Since community norms ('normalize' pregnancy and birth) and social capital (trust and collaboration amongst individuals and organizations) also impact birth outcomes, another objective of this strategy is to change social norms to enhance pregnancy and birth outcomes (breastfeeding as the best infant nutrition) and strengthen social capital (effectiveness of the networking through the HBLCs) in the community to promote healthy births.

Implementation

For this strategy, we define "community" as "*a group of people with diverse characteristics who are linked by social ties, share common perspectives, and engage in joint action in geographical locations or setting.*" This definition of "community" is broad enough to allow each community to define itself, rather than be defined by an external agent.

Several models of community building have been developed. Successful community building efforts include the following steps:

- Assessing community needs and resources
- Defining the problem
- Building community coalition
- Engaging collaborative planning
- Developing an action plan
- Implementing community and systems change
- Developing an evaluation plan
- Creating sustainability

An important lesson learned from the Healthy Start program was that several projects lost their focus (and weakened their effectiveness) by going too far in their community building efforts. Therefore, it is recommended that communities focus their efforts on building community infrastructure and social capital as they relate directly to the perinatal health priorities raised by the HBLC members and discussed in the Community Assessment (Section V). To support these community building activities it is recommended that applicants for the Healthy Births Initiative engage in collaborative partnerships that include individuals who are not traditionally thought of as part of the maternal and child health world. This could include partnerships with faith-based organizations, businesses, and schools, among others.

A brief for implementation of community building can be found under Resources.