

Fathers and Families: Innovations in Digital Support, Disability and Engagement

Following up on our 2024 [Mother's Day Report](#), FCHIP presents the fourth annual Father's Day Report. Bridging from our Mother's Day highlights, we present Father's Day-relevant information on innovative father-focused technology programs, fathers with disabilities, and how states are bringing fathers into maternal and child health spaces. We continue to highlight images from the Lurie Family Photobook, an ongoing project compiling images of Lurie Children's families in the hospital and in the community.

DIGITAL SUPPORT FOR DADS

While involved fathers bring many benefits to their children's development, dads often do not have equal access to parenting support and have started online communities and forums to provide peer support. [A study that analyzed posts on Reddit forums for dads](#) found that in response to fathers sharing personal, family, and broader life struggles, other members offered advice, confirmation, and encouragement. Sharing builds a sense of community and serves to normalize parenting stressors.

In Australia, researchers collaborated with the moderator of a Facebook group for dads to explore these sharing benefits. [Using a survey](#) of 145 members found that over a quarter of fathers reported improvements in mental health and well-being from group participation.



Our central tenet is "Children Thrive when Families Thrive." Established in 2020, FCHIP is housed at Ann & Robert H. Lurie Children's Hospital of Chicago, in the Stanley Manne Children's Research Institute and the Mary Ann & J. Milburn Smith Child Health Outcomes, Research and Evaluation Center.

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FCHIP is directed by founder [Craig F. Garfield, MD, MAPP](#).

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Another major benefit was being able to talk and connect with other fathers. Observing how other dads navigated issues helped give fathers different perspectives on how to address challenges in their families, including making positive changes in parenting that benefited their families.

For more on mental health for dads, check out [this article](#) co-written by FCHIP's Craig Garfield, MD, MAPP, and Tova Walsh, PhD, MSW, MS.

Another technological innovation from Australia is the [SMS4Dads](#) program, which uses technology to support fathers. Dads who sign up for the program receive three text messages a week that correspond with their baby's age and developmental stage, providing information on infant health and development, as well as tracking mood and mental health, in addition to encouragement and ways for fathers to support their partners. Messages are specifically tailored for dads, and the program offers culturally appropriate messages for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders. Additionally, fathers with a baby in the NICU or fathers who have experienced the loss of their baby can sign up for specialized sets of messages developed in partnership with parents who have gone through similar experiences. With the success of SMS4Dads in Australia, the texts have been [translated](#) to Swahili and Spanish and sent to dads in Kenya and Colombia.

For parents: To find resources in your area specific to fatherhood, check out [fatherhood.gov](#), [Help Me Grow](#) or the [211](#) network.

For clinicians and researchers: Fill out [this form](#) to set up a Dad Consult with FCHIP experts on inclusion of fathers in research and clinical spaces.

FATHERS WITH DISABILITIES

Research on fathers with disabilities is limited but growing; the [National Research Center for Parents with Disabilities](#) is leading efforts to center fathers in disability research. They found that fathers with disabilities are [more likely to report that their partner's most recent pregnancy was unintended](#) compared to fathers without disabilities. Compared with men who have disabilities and are not parents, fathers with disabilities are [more likely to report fair or poor health, frequent physical and mental distress, and obesity](#).

Studies about the experiences of fathers with disabilities are ongoing, including around the time of the birth of a new baby. In alignment with the Center for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC's) [Pregnancy Risk Assessment Monitoring System \(PRAMS\)](#), the [same question](#) about disability status asked of PRAMS mothers is now included in the PRAMS for Dads survey in the field in two states. This question asks about hearing, vision, mobility, cognitive, self-care, and independent living disabilities. States that participate in PRAMS for Dads are currently asking this question in their surveys. Once the data is available, we will be able to use it to learn more about the experiences of fathers with disabilities.



To hear directly from fathers with disabilities about their parenting joys and challenges, check out this recent [webinar](#) from the National Research Center for Parents with Disabilities.

STATE FATHER HEALTH INNOVATIONS



Washington Fatherhood Council's Provider Learning Series

The goal of the [Washington Fatherhood Council](#) is to reduce poverty and inequality through increased fatherhood access and belonging. Each month, the group hosts a [Dad Allies Provider Learning Series](#) session for service providers who work with fathers to build knowledge and skills. Past sessions have addressed topics such as helping fathers navigate state systems like child support and establishing parentage, the impact of historical trauma on fathers today, engaging fathers in home visiting, and the importance of father involvement during pregnancy and with a new baby. Recordings of past presentations are available on the [website](#).

Strong Fathers, Strong Families Georgia Coalition and Fathers Matter ATL

Since 2019, leaders from across Georgia have participated in the Strong Fathers, Strong Families Georgia Coalition (SFSF GA), with a goal to develop systems that better support fathers and families. Using a multi-tiered [Community Mobilization Approach](#) plan developed by the [National Fatherhood Initiative \(NFI\)](#) to engage and support fathers, they evaluate the needs of fathers, provide guidance, training, and support to a larger network of organizations that serve fathers, implement fatherhood curriculums, like NFI's [24/7 Dad](#) curriculum, and work with the [Fathers Matter ATL](#) Initiative to continue the work of the coalition in Metro Atlanta. Fathers Matter ATL uses the following strategies to improve father supports:

- Connecting fathers to resources and to each other
- Reaching fathers
- Improving relationships (between men and institutions; between co-parents)
- Supporting inner healing
- Reclaiming the narrative
- Addressing mass incarceration
- Implementing father-friendly policies

Strong Fathers/Padres Fuertes of Kent County, Michigan

In 2016, the organization [Strong Beginnings](#) in Kent County, Michigan, started the Strong Fathers/Padres Fuertes program. The program started after [focus groups](#) with Latinx parents in the county showed that more father-specific support for new parents was needed. Strong Fathers/Padres Fuertes is open to men raising children up to 18 months old. Through the program, fathers can get education about family health, ideas on how to support their partners, and help with access to resources like transportation, job resources, and baby supplies. The coordinator of the program, Adnoris 'Bo' Torres, has also hosted virtual [Manhood Monday](#) meetings through Facebook to connect with dads in the community.