

# The GRANT COUNTY BEAT

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## First Born ®, Silver City's Home Grown Program Shines

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A new evaluation of Silver City's First Born® program shows positive health outcomes for infants and families. Dr. Becky Kilburn was the lead researcher for the RAND Evaluation results released earlier this week and printed in the January issue of Pediatrics, the peer-reviewed Journal of the American Academy of Pediatrics. As President of the New Mexico Pediatric Society and a pediatrician serving children in the southwest corner of New Mexico, I appreciate that our homegrown program is getting well-deserved recognition. The results demonstrate First Born ®, prevents costly health care with a team of trained health care workers and home visitors.

Home visitation programs provide pregnant women and families with visits by a trained educator and nurse as needed. New parents learn about pregnancy care, how to comfort and feed their baby, and about "serve and return" communication that supports their child's growth and development. Home visitors also help connect families to resources and solutions for their challenges.

Until recently, we didn't know how fast brains develop in babies and toddlers. Now a wide body of research shows that toxic stress and adverse experiences can literally stunt their brain architecture, and consequences last a lifetime. First Born ® and other programs are key to what babies need and what is best practice.

Babies are not born with a user's manual. Any parent can find it challenging to soothe a crying baby and summon positive discipline skills to manage a trying toddler. Education and support can be helpful as parents practice new skills.

Avoiding adverse childhood experiences is one of the best ways to prevent children from exposure to destructive behaviors. Preventing the bad experiences and nurturing the good ones also helps save money down the road. There is a proven connection between adverse childhood experiences and the expensive consequences that appear later such as dropping out of school, getting involved in the criminal justice system, developing health disorders, and even suffering the death of a child. As shown in the Pediatrics article, this home visitation program reduces emergency room visits, producing immediate cost savings.

Because First Born ® is such an amazing resource to the first time parents of Grant County, it needs to be expanded. Statewide, only one out of every 20 babies and toddlers currently benefits from a home visitation program. That's why I want to thank our legislators for increasing their commitment to home visiting and urge them to expand funding through Medicaid and other federal sources. The Pediatrics article is a great step in the right direction for First Born ® to qualify as a Medicaid supported program. Given our state's current financial situation and that we already draw half of our home visiting funding from federal sources, this seems a sensible path forward to reach more children.

Home Visiting is a win-win investment that pays back in many ways. With proven reductions in long-term consequences, it pays for itself and creates jobs for the residents of our communities. We strengthen both the economy and the potential of infants, children, and families in our community. **We can do this, and we should do this.**

Sincerely,

Brian Etheridge, MD, FAAP  
President, New Mexico Pediatric Society

