



# NURTURING A HEALTHY DYAD

## THE IMPORTANCE OF MATERNAL AND INFANT MENTAL HEALTH

The role of mental health in the relationship between a mother or caregiver and an infant, (referred to as a dyad) cannot be overstated. The primary caregiver for an infant has a unique opportunity to provide care and nurturing that serves as a basis for healthy development of the child—their own mental wellbeing is a critical factor in their ability to engage and connect.

Nurturing and supporting the dyad requires awareness of the importance of mental health during the perinatal period. Regular screening by all professionals and service providers who engage with new families, policies and investments that promote interventions that can provide tools to cope and therapies when needed are crucial to support maternal and infant mental health.

### **Policy considerations for enhancing maternal and infant mental health:**

- Seek funding and reimbursement for additional maternal mental health (depression) screenings in both medical care settings and community-based services that are evidence-based and measurable.
- Utilize incentives to encourage patient participation and to improve referral follow-up practices.
- Expand use of universal availability of innovative screening tools like High Tech, High Touch (HT2) that provide prompt referral and follow-up to identified needs with sustainable funding.
- Position and resource mental health professionals, including infant mental health specialists and behavioral health consultants, in trusted settings to deliver immediate services.
- Advocate for sustainable funding and increase utilization of telepsychiatry support to primary care, including obstetrical and pediatric, providers.
- Commission a Michigan-specific study on the prevalence of perinatal mental illness and mood disorders, associated maternal and infant outcomes, and the cost of untreated illness.



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