



## *In Southeastern Ohio, babies at risk of not getting needed care*

July 15, 2020

### Meet Haley Barnett...



Haley Barnett is a Family Nurse Navigator working for Jackson Vinton Community Action Inc. (JVCAI). JVCAI provides opportunities for families and individuals in Jackson and Vinton counties Ohio to be healthier, better educated, more independent, and better able to advocate for themselves. <https://www.ivcai.org/>



### Expectant Moms and Babies

Haley works with pregnant women, helping them access medical care throughout their pregnancy and first postpartum visit. She also assists moms in obtaining health and social services benefits that support healthy child development including their first well-child check after birth.

### Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic

Since March 2020 when social distancing became the norm, Haley and her co-workers have mostly worked from home, staying in touch with their moms by phone.

Haley has seen serious challenges to providing care to pregnant women and their newborn infants during the COVID-19 pandemic. "The birth of a child is already a very stressful time for new parents," she says, "imagine adding a lack of healthcare and the isolation that a lack of technology can bring about."

Some of Haley's clients are not receiving Medicaid and other benefits because they are unable to submit an application. A general lack of internet access, computers, and in some cases, phones among her clients makes it nearly impossible to apply for Medicaid, especially during the pandemic with a stay-at-home order in effect and many government offices closed. These women are facing the reality going through pregnancy with little support or access to healthcare.

Many of the women Haley supports are enrolled in the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC). During the pandemic, WIC providers offer their consultations through a "drive-through" service, where they can load money onto the WIC card so that parents can purchase formula and food. However, providers have been unable to conduct their normal check-ups that include assessing the baby's height and weight, which is

## Unemployment

Jackson County

12.1%

Vinton County

12.6%

**57,713**

Babies born in Ohio  
since January, 2020

**42%**

Covered by Medicaid

Unfortunately, one more missed opportunity to check on the health and well-being of the infants. Haley explains that new moms are taking their newborns to their first well-check, but unless there is a problem noted at the first visit, they often skip further checks out of fear of exposing the baby to COVID-19. Many women also face the challenge of finding convenient, safe transportation to doctor visits during the pandemic. While JVCAI and the Medicaid Managed Care Organizations provide transportation to medical appointments, it's often with multiple clients and moms may be dropped off early for appointments and are picked up when all appointments in that group are finished. This means a medical appointment becomes an all-day affair and risks exposing the baby to numerous people along the way. In addition, some clients do not have car seats, which presents another barrier to transporting their baby to and from

appointments.

We all want our babies to thrive and flourish, however where a child and their family live greatly determines whether they have access to healthcare, technology, internet access, and transportation needed to meet their basic needs. For the women and children Haley works with in southeastern Ohio, as well as pregnant women across the state, the following recommendations support their efforts to make sure all babies have access to healthcare during the pandemic and beyond.

### Recommendations.

1. **Fund greater broadband connectivity in underserved areas.** HB 13 and HB 190 would create grant programs to bring broadband into underserved areas. Though these proposals are limited and do not meet the demand that it exists, they represent a step forward in helping the region to realize the potential that telehealth offers in healthcare shortage areas.
2. **Extend Medicaid coverage to 12 months post-partum** to support maternal and infant health. Ohio is a leader nationally in terms of infant and maternal mortality. Extending health coverage and access to mothers and infants is a critical factor in reversing this trend.
3. **Protect funding and increase accessibility for Ohio's evidence-based home visiting and Infant vitality programs** to encourage early prenatal and well-baby care, and check in on the mother's health.
4. **Remove barriers to critical well-child checkups** that prevent new mothers from seeking care and support, such as inadequate access to transportation and technology.



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