

Vermont MOMS PartnershipSM Pilot Evaluation Report

Executive Summary

OVERVIEW

The Mental health Outreach for MotherS (MOMS) Partnership[®] is a program designed to reduce depressive symptoms and meet the mental health needs of low-income women who are primary caregivers and are experiencing mild to moderate depressive symptoms. The Vermont MOMS PartnershipSM (VT MOMS), a partnership between Vermont Department of Children and Families (DCF) Economic Services Division (ESD) and Howard Center, was established in late 2018 to bring MOMS Partnership services to families connected to DCF programs. VT MOMS aims to promote the social and economic mobility of Vermont's families by improving the mental health and wellbeing of mothers and caregivers.

Planning for VT MOMS began in late 2018 and services, providing MOMS Stress Management (SM) course to eligible women connected to Vermont's Reach Up, Reach Ahead, Reach First, or Post-Secondary Education programs, launched in February 2020. The MOMS SM course is a Cognitive Behavioral Therapy-based group course that targets mood management and meets for a 90-minute session each week for eight weeks. The MOMS SM course is co-delivered by a mental health clinician and a Community Mental Health Ambassador (CMHA), a paid staff member who is also a parent or caregiver from the local community and shares lived experience with program participants.

The pilot of VT MOMS included six cohorts of MOMS SM between February 2020 and June 2021. After the first two weeks of in-person classes, MOMS SM transitioned to virtual service delivery in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and classes were held via Zoom for the remainder of the pilot. Over the course of six pilot cohorts, 96 women participated in MOMS SM classes.

EVALUATION

The evaluation of VT MOMS utilized self-report data collected from participants as well as data provided by staff on participant attendance. Participants completed assessment surveys at three time points: Baseline, Endpoint (i.e., course completion) and a Follow-up (i.e., three months after course completion). These assessments contained questions about participants' mental health and wellbeing, social support, basic needs, and parenting / child wellbeing.

KEY FINDINGS

Participants in VT MOMS

Most (n=96, 87.5%) individuals who were eligible to participate in MOMS SM after screening attended at least one MOMS SM class. Most participants were women born in the United States,

identified as white and non-Hispanic, had never been married, and had at least a high school education or GED. More than 40% had received outpatient mental health care in the past year.

Participant Engagement and Satisfaction

- Participants attended most classes: the median attendance was 6 out of 8 classes.
- Most participants (94%) were satisfied or very satisfied with the MOMS SM course.
- Participants reported frequently utilizing skills or strategies from the MOMS SM course; 97% indicated using at least one of the course components often or every day at course completion.

Improvements in Measures of Mental Health

- **Depressive symptoms, depressive severity** and **generalized anxiety** significantly decreased from Baseline to course completion; the decrease remained 3-months after course completion.
- After engagement in MOMS SM, almost 40% of participants had **depressive symptoms** that were below the threshold for at risk for clinical depression.
- **Perceived Stress** significantly decreased from Baseline to Endpoint (the two timepoints where perceived stress was measured), suggesting an overall decrease in perceived stress after the course.
- Participants reported a significant decrease in difficulties with emotion regulation over time, which indicates **improvement in emotional regulatory capacities** after the course.

Increased Social Support

Participants indicated more social support after the course: **overall functional social support** and **instrumental social support** (i.e., assistance provided to meet tangible needs) significantly increased from Baseline to Endpoint to 3-month Follow-up.

Summary

Evaluation findings suggest that VT MOMS was correlated with positive changes in participants' self-reported mental health and wellbeing indicators. The findings from the pilot evaluation suggest that, as intended, participants generally reported improvements in indicators of mental health and social support. These positive changes and improvements occurred even in the context of the global pandemic, which presented health and economic challenges for participants, as well as challenges to program implementation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Drawing on the findings from this evaluation, the report offers the following recommendations to build on the momentum of current VT MOMS programming and deepen the value that future participants can derive:

1. Continue to include virtual services in the menu of service delivery options.
2. Pursue opportunities for social connectedness for participants.
3. Further align maternal mental health programming with economic mobility efforts.
4. Collaborate to address other maternal mental health stressors.
5. Partner to understand two-generational outcomes.

Excerpted from:

Callinan, L.S., Yeh, E.J., & Hahn, H. (2023). *Vermont MOMS PartnershipSM Pilot Evaluation Report*. Elevate Policy Lab, Yale School of Medicine.

For the full Vermont MOMS PartnershipSM Pilot Evaluation Report, please contact Elevate Policy Lab at elevate@yale.edu.

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