

Program Snapshot: The Western Mass MOMS PartnershipSM

By Krista O’Connell and Kristen Joyce


Many mothers struggle with depression and social isolation, which can negatively affect their labor market success. Mental health may be particularly challenging for mothers with low incomes, who are less likely to have access to therapeutic services and other social supports.

The Western Mass MOMS PartnershipSM (Western Mass MOMS) strives to reduce depressive symptoms, improve social connections, and improve the labor market success of caregivers with low incomes. Western Mass MOMS offers a course that teaches stress management skills and provides opportunities for social connection with peers, and also offers employment services. Western Mass MOMS serves caregivers with low incomes in Holyoke and Springfield, Massachusetts, who identify as women or nonbinary, are pregnant or have at one least child under age 18, and are experiencing symptoms of depression. The program makes special efforts to recruit recipients of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families.

Western Mass MOMS is based on the **Mental Health Outreach for MotherS (MOMS) Partnership[®]** model, which was created by Dr. Megan Smith in 2011 while she was at the Yale School of Medicine. The MOMS Partnership model was implemented in seven other locations before it was adopted in Western Massachusetts. To directly address the caregivers’ work and educational needs, Western Mass MOMS added employment services to the model. Western Mass MOMS is implemented by Viability, Inc., a nonprofit organization, with support from Yale University’s Elevate Policy Lab, The Adjacent Possible, and the Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance. It is one of several programs participating in the Next Generation of Enhanced Employment Strategies (NextGen) Project (see box).



Next Generation of Enhanced Employment Strategies (NextGen) Project



The goal of the NextGen Project is to identify and study innovative employment programs for people facing complex employment challenges. The study explores how the programs are designed and operated, their cost, and how effective they are at improving participants’ employment, earnings, and other outcomes related to economic self-sufficiency and well-being. The NextGen Project is part of the Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation’s [Innovative Strategies for Addressing Employment Barriers Portfolio](#), which seeks to rigorously evaluate the “next generation” of employment strategies for individuals with low income, and is partnering with the Social Security Administration on select evaluations.

Five key features of Western Mass MOMS

- 1. The MOMS Stress Management Course that teaches skills and provides opportunities for social connection.** The core of the Western Mass MOMS model is the Stress Management Course, which is informed by cognitive behavioral therapy principles. A mental health clinician and a community mental health ambassador (CMHA) (see below) co-deliver a sequence of eight, weekly 90-minute sessions to groups of up to 10 participants. A detailed curriculum guides each session. The sessions cover practical skills for managing life stress and improving mental wellness; these include relaxation techniques, breath control, problem-solving skills, and communication skills.

Participants receive homework assignments, such as tracking their moods or practicing a skill, to complete between sessions. The group sessions also provide an opportunity for participants to build social connections with other caregivers. Participants support one another and share challenges and solutions. Western Mass MOMS offers the course in person and virtually, in Spanish and English.

- 2. CMHAs.** CMHAs are program staff with lived experiences similar to those of the program participants. In addition to co-delivering the Stress Management Course, CMHAs conduct outreach and enrollment, encourage engagement in Western Mass MOMS, and make referrals to other services.
- 3. Employment services.** Western Mass MOMS offers services to help participants plan a career, engage in education or training for a job, and obtain a job. The program offers these optional services in weekly, one-hour virtual sessions with other participants, called Moving Forward groups, conducted in English and Spanish. Participants can also meet one-on-one with an employment specialist or the job developer, as needed, for additional employment support.
- 4. Supports for engagement in program activities.** Western Mass MOMS provides a \$25 gift card to participants for attending each Stress Management class. During the in-person sessions, Western Mass MOMS provides child supervision in a separate room. The in-person Stress Management classes are held at community locations that are familiar and accessible to participants, such as a church or community center. Given the enduring challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic and participants' busy schedules, some Stress Management classes and the Moving Forward groups are offered virtually.
- 5. Connections to community resources.** Clinicians, CMHAs, employment specialists, and the job developer refer Western Mass MOMS participants to other programs and resources in the community as needed, such as for mental health treatment or basic needs.

The NextGen Project will release research findings about Western Mass MOMS periodically through 2028.

The project team will collect and analyze information about how Western Mass MOMS operates, its successes and challenges, its cost, and its effectiveness compared with other services available in the community. For more information, visit the NextGen Project's web page <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/project/next-generation-enhanced-employment-strategies-project-2018-2028> or email us NextGenProject@mathematica-mpr.com about receiving regular updates on the project.

This program snapshot was produced by Mathematica on behalf of the Administration for Children and Families (ACF), Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation (OPRE) under contract number HHSP2332015000351/HHSP23337035T. The OPRE project officers are Hilary Bruck, Marie Lawrence, Sarita Barton, and Megan Reid. The NextGen Project director is Annalisa Mastri. The views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of OPRE, ACF, or the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Suggested citation: O'Connell, Krista, and Kristen Joyce. "Program Snapshot: The Western Mass MOMS PartnershipSM." OPRE Report #2024-178. Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2024. For more information about OPRE's research, see <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre>.

Connect with OPRE

