



## OPERATION RX FOR SUCCESS FOR MILITARY FAMILIES

### ABOUT REACH OUT AND READ

Reach Out and Read gives young children a foundation for success by incorporating books into pediatric care and encouraging families to read aloud together. Our objective is to provide all children with a strong foundation; cognitively, physically, and social-emotionally, giving them the best possible start to life, leveling the playing field for all children, and building strong, resilient families.



We strive to reduce the opportunity gap; to create a world where family income, race, and geography are no longer predictors of school and life success. We envision a world where all parents have daily, meaningful, language-rich interactions with their child, a world where every child is read to every day as close, loving relationships support a child's ability to thrive. In fact, research increasingly demonstrates the significant impact that a child's early relationships with their caregivers have on all aspects of their cognitive and social emotional development and future well-being, and that positive, language-rich parent-child interactions provide the foundation for future health, academic, social, and economic success.

Reading, singing, and spending time together is a way to foster social-emotional connection, and the development of individual competencies (problem solving skills, self-regulation, agency). Protective factors like these help a child feel loved, secure, and safe especially after experiencing Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES) and help to neutralize the physical and emotional changes that naturally occur during and after trauma.

To realize these goals, we maximize the potential of pediatric primary care to promote these positive interactions that foster healthy child development during the critical early years of a child's life, birth through age 5, when their brain develops more rapidly than at any other time in their life. We partner with medical clinics that serve under-resourced households, families of color, families who speak a home language other than English, and other historically marginalized groups. Incorporating books and storytelling into primary care in a way that supports talking, singing, and playing strengthens the positive, language-rich parent- and caregiver-child relationships that are foundational for healthy early childhood development, combat inequity, and address social determinants of health.

The Reach Out and Read program begins in infancy and continues through age five. Pediatric teams provide new developmentally, linguistically, and culturally appropriate books to children and share literacy advice with parents at each well-child visit. The program is both cost-effective, and [evidence-based](#): research shows that Reach Out and Read has a significant, positive effect on parental behavior and attitudes toward reading aloud; parents are 2.5X more likely to read to their children; children demonstrate higher language scores – 3 to 6 months ahead of their non-participating peers by kindergarten, a determining factor for school success; and children grow up with more books in the home, in indicator of school longevity. Our intervention successfully prepares children for school success by reaching them prior to any formal preschool or classroom setting, making our intervention especially important for those children who do not have access to pre-school programs and most need our services.

There is also research showing that caretakers who are introduced to Reach Out and Read demonstrate a significant increase in compliance with well-child visits, with the largest differences found among Latino families and children of less-educated families. Increased well-child visit compliance leads to increased developmental screenings and vaccine compliance. On the strength of our evidence base, our model has been endorsed by the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) for both literacy development and the prevention of toxic stress, and the Pediatric Nurse Practitioner Association (NAPNAP); we are also allied with the American Academy of Family Physicians (AAFP).

Today, 40,000 medical providers at more than 6,000 clinical locations nationwide implement our model. Last year, even with the ongoing disruptions of the COVID pandemic, Reach Out and Read was part of 8.3 million interactions between pediatric care providers, children, and caregivers and helped children add 6.4 million books to their home libraries.

## THE REACH OUT AND READ MODEL

The Reach Out and Read intervention is based around a simple yet powerful model of prescribing shared reading to foster positive, language-rich interactions between parents and children beginning at birth. Our intervention leverages the period of rapid-fire neurological development from birth through age five, when young children build the skills and emotional connections that set the stage for school readiness, emotional maturity, and physical and mental health.

- 1. The Conversation:** Pediatric medical providers, trained in our intervention, speak with parents about the importance of reading aloud at least 20 minutes a day, starting in infancy. Providers model developmentally appropriate practices, such as dialogic reading, that are accessible to all caregivers, including those who have low literacy or limited English language skills.
- 2. The Book:** At each well-child visit from 6-months through 5-years, the child receives a new book to take home and build their home library. For many of our families, these are the only books they own. Books are chosen to be developmentally, linguistically, and culturally appropriate and are approved by Reach Out and Read's Book Committee. During the visit, the doctor also uses the book to evaluate the child's development by her ability to turn pages, recognize numbers and letters, and engage in other age-appropriate reading activities.
- 3. Clinic and Beyond:** Because parents view pediatric healthcare providers as experts in child development, they are far more likely to follow their "prescription" to read together daily and engage in literacy activities like visiting the library and museums, far extending the program's impact outside of the exam room.



Our intervention is individualized to each family and supports equity, diversity, and inclusion- it is not "one size fits all." Although the basic framework of our intervention is consistent, our providers are trained to understand and meet the unique needs of each child and family, just as they do when addressing other aspects of health and development.

Our medical providers are not compensated for delivering our intervention, they devotedly volunteer. Providers find our intervention to be a useful, efficient approach that blends well with clinical practices. Doctor Dipesh Navsaria, Reach Out and Read Board Chair and co-founder of Reach Out and Read Wisconsin, says, "In a well-child visit where there is no other clearly identified problem at the outset, I would rather walk in without my stethoscope than without a book."

## OPERATION RX FOR SUCCESS FOR MILITARY FAMILIES

Operation Rx for Success for Military Families addresses the specific relational health needs of military families through the consistent delivery of Reach Out and Read's evidence-based, intervention (as described above) at pediatric primary care clinics on military installations serving military families.

Reach Out and Read currently has 70 active sites located on military installations in 28 states and internationally, serving children and families at approximately 207,524 well-child visits annually.

Military families face distinctive social and emotional challenges, including frequent moves, deployments and other separations, and the physical, emotional, and psychological consequences of serving in combat and other highly stressful environments. These have consequences for both children and parents.

Operation Rx for Success for Military Families is designed to help military families with these challenges by providing new books and advice from medical providers

that specifically address their unique challenges. For example, books like [The Kissing Hand](#) or [The Fathers are Coming Home](#) may be chosen for our military programs to help children cope with separation and reunions. Among many other benefits, reading aloud is a proven technique to help children cope during stressful times or tragedy, making it an extremely simple and useful technique for military families. Reading aloud provides a buffer against toxic stress, which can have life-long, negative effects on a child's brain and emotional development.

Pediatric clinicians practicing on military installations have a unique view of Reach Out and Read's benefit for the children and families they serve. They consider it an important contributor to military preparedness, advancement toward equity, a protective factor that promotes resiliency for children and families under substantial stress, and a program that aligns with the mission of the Armed Services. Lee Beers, MD, President of the AAP shared, "I think a lot about how we make sure all families have equitable access to opportunities to ensure their families can thrive. One of the wonderful things about Reach Out and Read is that when you walk into the [exam] room with a book and you see the child's eyes light up ... I took care of lots of families in the military who were quite low income based on their rank and the salaries they get at their rank. For many of them, the books they get from Reach Out and Read are almost the only books they have in their homes... It reminds you how important it is to continue to push and fight to ensure that every family has access to what they need to help their family thrive."

With frequent moves, military families often struggle with inconsistency. By offering Reach Out and Read on military installations, families have the consistency of the program as they move from installation to installation. They also have the consistency of shared reading as a family as part of their daily routine.

"Reach Out and Read is very well loved by our patients, parents and providers. Children are always excited about coming in to get new books. It really makes a difference in helping families promote early literacy and a love for reading but also to help the children have another outlet to deal with the stresses related to deployments, prolonged parent/caregiver absences and frequent moves that are common in the military." - USAF Langley Hospital

Funding is critically important for our military sites as they are unable to fundraise for themselves where they are staffed by military personnel / federal employees who are prohibited from fundraising.

