

BRIEF

Home Visiting Provides Essential Services

HOME VISITING PROGRAMS REQUIRE ADDITIONAL FUNDING
TO SUPPORT MORE FAMILIES

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KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Home visiting programs offer essential services that families depend on even more during the COVID-19 pandemic and resulting recession.
- In response to COVID-19, home visiting programs have adapted to provide effective telehealth services and to address families' growing needs.
- Home visiting programs require additional funding to be able to serve all eligible families and to support high-quality telehealth service delivery during the pandemic.

WHAT IS HOME VISITING & WHY IS IT NEEDED?

Home visiting programs connect families with nurses, social workers, or other trained professionals who partner with parents to create a healthy home environment and best support their children.¹ The programs use prevention strategies that center relationships between participants and practitioners to support pregnant people and parents of young children.² Strategies are designed to strengthen parent-child interactions, promote healthy child development, and support stable family systems.³ Home visiting is a voluntary, free-of-charge service designed to meet the unique needs of families with children from the prenatal period to age five.⁴ Nearly 70% of families participating in federally-funded home visiting programs have household incomes at or below 100 percent of the federal poverty line.⁵

HOME VISITING PROGRAMS ARE ESPECIALLY ESSENTIAL DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, home visiting was already an essential service that supported families with young children who faced a variety of challenges. Now, with heightened risks to public health and economic wellbeing, home visiting programs require additional resources to serve the increasing number of families and children who need them. Amidst this public health crisis,

many families are experiencing loss of employment and income, lack of childcare, and difficulty affording basic needs.⁶ Social isolation from the closures of employers, schools, places of worship, and more can lead to increases in domestic violence, anxiety and depression, and child maltreatment.⁷ Home visiting programs help prevent and mitigate these challenges by maintaining consistent contact and support between a trained professional and family.⁸

HOME VISITING PROGRAMS ARE PROVEN INTERVENTIONS

Research indicates that evidence-based home visiting programs can improve maternal health, improve birth outcomes, enhance child health and school readiness, reduce instances of child abuse and neglect, strengthen family economic security, and increase high school graduation rates for participating mothers.^{9, 10} Studies show that home visiting has also reduced pregnancy-induced hypertension for new mothers, infant mortality rates, and infant emergency medical care rates.¹¹ These outcomes make home visiting programs a smart investment.¹²

HOW HAS THE HOME VISITING FIELD RESPONDED TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC?

Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, home visiting programs have innovated their practices to deliver essential services for children and families in accordance with public health guidelines. To do this, home visiting programs adapted to deliver family supports through virtual connections and other physically-distanced interactions. These programs have leveraged best practices in telehealth delivery to meet participants' needs by connecting with families on phone and video platforms,¹³ incorporating evidence-based strategies from Parents as Teachers' virtual home visiting practices.^{14, 15}

Throughout the pandemic, home visiting programs have also met the growing needs of the children and families they serve by enhancing their social and economic supports. Home visiting programs have distributed food, diapers, and other vital supports that help families meet their basic needs. Home visitors have also distributed resources

to support education and parent-child interactions, while following physical distancing guidelines. Home visiting practitioners have even used their personal internet, cellular network, and devices to facilitate telehealth visits with families.¹⁶



VIRTUAL HOME VISITING SUCCESSES IN SPITE OF COVID-19

Alongside the many challenges the COVID-19 pandemic creates for home visiting programs, the programs report unexpected benefits of telehealth service delivery. In response to the pandemic, the home visiting field launched a national collaborative project called Rapid Response Virtual Home Visiting (RR VHV) to help support the implementation of best practices. Participating home visitors have shared that telehealth services allow them to connect more frequently with many families.¹⁷ Families have reported that virtual home visits offer positive support connections that have helped alleviate anxiety and negative feelings amidst social distancing and stay-at-home orders.¹⁸

Early results indicate that virtual home visiting programs have successfully engaged families throughout the pandemic. Preliminary data from the SafeCare home visiting program shows that through remote service delivery, families are progressing toward targeted skill-building goals and are demonstrating high engagement with virtual services.¹⁹ Results are particularly promising among families who are geographically isolated.²⁰ Programs have also seen increases in visit frequency and declines in cancellation rates since the implementation of virtual service delivery.²¹ Data from one home visiting model, Parents As Teachers, shows that more visits occurred in one month of virtual connections than in the prior three months of in-person visiting.²²

HOME VISITING PROGRAMS REQUIRE MORE INVESTMENT TO BETTER SERVE FAMILIES

Despite proven benefits, home visiting programs lack the resources necessary to serve all eligible families. The National Home Visiting Resource Center estimates that nearly 23 million children who could benefit from home visiting programs do not have access to these services.²³ The lack of adequate investment in home visiting programs particularly hurts families of color who disproportionately rely on these services and who have been hit the hardest by the COVID-19 pandemic and recession.²⁴

²⁵ In fact, 23% of all families served through home visiting programs are Black (compared to 13% of all families in the country) and 30% are Latino/a (compared to 19% of all families in the country).^{26, 27} Families of color disproportionately rely on these services partially because many home visiting programs were started as components of broader efforts to improve racial equity in infant and maternal health.²⁸

Additional federal funding is required to adequately support home visiting programs, due to state budget cuts and lowered family wellbeing amidst the ongoing pandemic and recession. The main source of federal funding for home visiting, the Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) program, has not increased since 2013.²⁹ While state and local governments have supplemented federal funding with their own investments in home visiting programs, state governments face significant revenue shortfalls due to COVID-19.³⁰ Now, in response to their participants' heightened needs resulting from the pandemic and ensuing recession, home visiting programs require enhanced investment to scale their services through telehealth and virtual visits. While the field has demonstrated an ability to successfully pivot towards telehealth service delivery, programs require additional funding to best meet the needs of the families it serves.

ABOUT THE RAPID RESPONSE VIRTUAL HOME VISITING PROJECT

In March 2020, the home visiting field launched a national collaborative project to help support the implementation of best practices. Initially funded by the Heising-Simons Foundation, the Rapid Response Virtual Home Visiting (RR VHV) project brings together stakeholders across models, states, and local implementing organizations to identify and address immediate needs of the field through shared decision making and learning. The Rapid Response VHV project provides regular connections through webinars, competency-based module trainings, and virtual resource materials to support program transition to virtual and telehealth service delivery. This project centers equity and explicitly values making consistent, high quality resources available to all programs regardless of resources, size, or location. This has allowed home visitors to obtain critical guidance and professional development to continue serving families while integrating telehealth practices in their immediate work during the pandemic and for long-term service delivery. Home visiting remains a critical lifeline for supporting families experiencing personal, economic, and health obstacles.

ABOUT THE GEORGETOWN CENTER ON POVERTY & INEQUALITY'S ECONOMIC SECURITY & OPPORTUNITY INITIATIVE

The Georgetown Center on Poverty and Inequality (GCPI) works with policymakers, researchers, practitioners, advocates, and people with lived experience to develop effective policies and practices that alleviate poverty and inequality in the United States. GCPI conducts research and analysis, develops policy and programmatic solutions, hosts convenings and events, and produces reports, briefs, and policy proposals. We develop and advance promising ideas and identify risks and harms of ineffective policies and practices, with a cross-cutting focus on racial and gender equity. The work of GCPI is conducted by two teams: the Initiative on Gender Justice and Opportunity and the Economic Security and Opportunity Initiative. The mission of GCPI's Economic Security and Opportunity Initiative (ESOI) is to expand economic inclusion in the United States through rigorous research, analysis, and ambitious ideas to improve programs and policies.

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ENDNOTES

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13. <https://www.hvresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/COVID-19s-Early-Impact-on-Home-Visiting.pdf>
14. The Rapid Response Virtual Home Visiting Project gathered this information through Zoom webinars and calls that have taken place between March, 2020 and August, 2020. This information is anecdotal and comes directly from practicing home visitors.
15. Parents as Teachers is a home visiting model that has been at the forefront of virtual service delivery since 2015, and has developed and published resources to support virtual home visiting in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. More information is available at <https://parentsasteachers.org/virtual-service-delivery>.
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