

Home Visiting and Child Welfare

Home Visiting as a Partner in Prevention

Home visiting provides structured, relationship-based services to pregnant women, parents, and caregivers with young children. Delivered by trained professionals, at the family's home or location of their choosing, home visiting focuses on strengthening parenting skills, promoting child development and school readiness, enhancing caregiver and family well-being, improving home safety, and connecting families to other services. Because children from birth to five years disproportionately enter child welfare services and infants have the highest rates of re-entry, supporting families with home visiting during this time can be especially impactful.

Home visiting is not a replacement for child protective services. Rather, it is a voluntary,

supportive intervention that works to address the underlying stressors and risk factors—such as social isolation, caregiver struggles with mental health, family financial distress, and lack of parenting support—that often contribute to child welfare involvement.

In the child welfare context, home visiting functions as:

- **Primary prevention**, supporting families before maltreatment occurs;
- **Secondary prevention**, reducing repeat maltreatment; and,
- **Complementary support**, working to promote stability and permanency, as part of family reunification and preservation.

Working Together: Home Visiting and Child Welfare

Advancing Prevention Evidence-based home visiting supports family preservation and reunification because it engages parents and caregivers in identifying, setting, and achieving goals for child safety, positive parenting, and child and family wellbeing. Home visiting directly supports this work by:

- Addressing family stressors early;
- Strengthening protective factors in families;
- Supporting parent and family goals;
- Promoting family stability and keeping families intact; and
- Connecting families to other prevention services.

Supporting Permanency and Child Well-Being By strengthening caregiver-child relationships and

parenting capacity, home visiting contributes to long-term stability and wellbeing.

Reaching Families Who Face Barriers to Services

Home visiting is well positioned to engage families who may struggle to access clinic-based or office-based services due to transportation barriers, distrust of systems, language barriers, or competing demands. Evidence suggests that home visiting is well equipped to meet the needs of all families due to the responsive nature of the relationship; for example, young parents involved with child welfare often engage meaningfully with home visiting, this engagement is due in part to services that are culturally responsive and trauma-informed.

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Building Collaboration across Child Welfare and Home Visiting

Define Roles and Expectations Confusion about roles and responsibilities between home visitors and child welfare case workers can undermine collaboration. Clear expectations about what each role can and cannot do as a function of their job are essential. This could include how the functions of each job can be complementary in supporting a family. It is also important to have clear expectations on what information is shared (e.g., progress toward family goals in home visiting, updates about family reunification plan from child welfare), how it is shared, and for what purposes.

Invest in Cross-System Training and Partnerships People are drawn to careers in child welfare and home visiting for very similar reasons: to support and promote child and family well-being. But the two fields of practice developed separately, resulting in different approaches, different requirements, and in some cases, different ways of defining the same term. Ongoing cross-training is necessary for building understanding of the strengths and limitations of both roles and understanding is the prerequisite to the trust required to develop authentic partnerships.

National model offices can support state agencies in developing and understanding training needs, referral pathways, and expectations of roles and responsibilities.

Build Clear Referral Pathways Effective integration requires intentional collaboration between child welfare agencies and home visiting programs, including collaboration on financial processes. States that have aligned referral systems, shared eligibility criteria, and coordinated outreach report stronger engagement and service continuity for families.

Align Funding Braiding funding streams—including Families First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA) in-home parent skill-based funds, Maternal Infant Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV), Medicaid, Temporary Aid to Needy Families, state general funds, and philanthropic investments—can support holistic family support services and sustainability of prevention programming. Shared outcomes and data systems help demonstrate impact to policymakers and funders.

“With my history of losing my three other children I questioned myself constantly. To have someone tell me when I was doing a good job parenting gave me the encouragement I needed to complete the program” – Parent

Key Strategies for State Agencies and Funders

A recent research-to-practice brief from the Institute for Home Visiting Workforce Development and the Jackie Wolorski Center for Evidence-Based Home Visiting underscores several strategies for strengthening partnerships between home visiting and child welfare. The resource entitled Improving partnerships and

coordination between home visiting and child welfare details strategies to strengthen partnership such as team-centered approaches, regular conferences and co-location of services and strategies to improve connections to home visiting by child welfare-involved families. These family focused strategies include warm-off

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hands to services and protocols that ensure families are connected to home visiting immediately, versus being placed on a waiting list. Each of these practices can be used in partnership with any home visiting model and in many instances multiple models are available to partner with child welfare. Several additional strategies, leveraging the home visiting system include:

- Position home visiting as a core component of family preservation strategies.
- Invest in workforce capacity, training, and data infrastructure.
- Use evidence of home visiting service impacts to guide implementation and continuous improvement of home visiting programs.
- Partner with national offices of home visiting models to understand home visiting services.

Overall, home visiting services are an effective strategy for preventing maltreatment and reducing repeat maltreatment, particularly when programs are well-implemented and appropriately matched with families. Home visiting impacts family well-being by increasing understanding of child development, reducing parental stress risk levels, and improving parenting efficacy and home safety practices.

Home visiting services are a strong prevention strategy: fidelity in the delivery of the services, workforce support, and system alignment are key to achieving these potential impacts. Home visiting is not a panacea, but it is a powerful tool that aligns with family preservation and preventing maltreatment, strengthening families, and promoting child well-being.

Home visiting strengthens families and prevents child abuse and neglect.

About the National Alliance of Home Visiting Models

The vision of the National Alliance of Home Visiting Models is to normalize evidence-based, prenatal and early childhood home visiting programs on a national scale as an integral component of services and programs to promote positive outcomes for all children. In order to improve the health and well-being of young children and their parents, the Model Alliance members seek to elevate and advance the field of evidence-based home visiting through collaborative leadership.

To learn more visit: www.nationalalliancehvmmodels.org

More resources on this topic and detailed references found here:

