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FACTSHEET

Strengthened Investments in Voluntary Home Visiting Can Help Improve Public Safety and Build the Future Workforce in Pennsylvania, and Bolster National Security

Voluntary, evidence-based home visiting programs provide vital support for vulnerable families, in-person and virtually. Implemented by trained professionals, these programs offer education and support and coordinate services from pregnancy into the early years of a child's life. These early investments can reduce costly future problems. Pennsylvania receives funds from the federal Maternal, Infant and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) program to implement home visiting services. Pennsylvania's MIECHV-funded models include: the Nurse-Family Partnership (NFP), Parents as Teachers (PAT), Family Check-up® (FCU), Early Head Start (EHS), SafeCare Augmented®, and Healthy Families America (HFA). In fiscal year (FY) 2021, the state received nearly $12 million in MIECHV funding.[1]

There are approximately 644,000 Pennsylvania families with young children, and over 122,000 of these are "highest-priority" families that could benefit from home visiting.[2] Due to limited funding, only 2,900 Pennsylvania families received MIECHV services.[3] This is equivalent to only about two percent of the highest-priority families. Instability in the home visiting workforce—due to poor compensation—is another substantial barrier that can limit reach in Pennsylvania.[4]

The Economic Case for Home Visiting

Children develop foundational skills needed for the workforce in the first five years of life.[5] Children living in poverty, including 19 percent of young children in Pennsylvania,[6] are more likely to experience academic failure.[7] Home visiting can help offset these challenges through early education. For example, participation in the PAT program resulted in higher scores in reading, math, and language at kindergarten entry and in later grades.[8] In addition, research finds a strong return on investment for some home visiting programs. For example, NFP yields net economic benefits (benefits minus costs) of $4,556 per family served.[9]



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The Public Safety Case for Home Visiting

In 2021, there were over 5,000 substantiated child abuse reports in Pennsylvania.[10] Child maltreatment can have serious and long-lasting implications for the well-being of children, including later criminal activity.[11] Home visiting programs provide a solution to help combat child maltreatment.[12] In a study, NFP participants had half as many verified incidents of maltreatment as non-participants.[13]

The National Security Case for Home Visiting

In Pennsylvania, 28 percent of children are either obese or overweight.[14] Nearly three-fourths of Pennsylvania youth are ineligible for military service[15] and obesity is a major disqualifier. Preventing these health disparities in the early years is paramount for national security,[16] and home visiting can play a role: PAT participants improved consumption of fruits and vegetables, and parents improved food preparation, compared to non-participants.[17]



In sum, voluntary, evidence-based home visiting programs can play a significant role in improving outcomes for Pennsylvania parents and children—building the future workforce, preventing crime, and bolstering national security. Pennsylvania members of Congress must prioritize and strengthen MIECHV. Without a renewed commitment that includes increased funding, virtual delivery, and improvements in workforce compensation, we run the risk of reversing gains and suspending future advancement, to the detriment of vulnerable Pennsylvania families and the nation.

Council for a Strong America is a national, bipartisan nonprofit that unites membership organizations, including law enforcement leaders, retired admirals and generals, and business executives, that promote solutions ensuring that our next generation of Americans will be successful, productive members of society.

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Endnotes

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