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BRIEF



Prioritizing Investments in Voluntary Home Visiting Strengthens Mississippi's Economic Future

Mississippi's voluntary, high-quality parental support programs can cultivate foundational skills and improve family stability

Building and sustaining a thriving Mississippi economy are contingent upon an educated and well-prepared workforce. Supporting parents and providing guidance during the prenatal and early childhood years is one of the most effective ways of cultivating children who can later fully participate in the labor force and become positive contributors to society. This is particularly vital for parents who face adversities—such as poverty, unemployment, teenage pregnancy, or single parenthood—that can hamper their ability to create and provide the environments needed for optimal brain development. Home visiting has proven to be a critical tool–helping vulnerable families build strong foundations that lead to later life success.[1] In Mississippi, less than two percent of families who need home visiting receive services. For this reason, the Mississippi Early Childhood Investment Council advocates for stronger investments in home visiting in our state.

In fiscal year (FY) 2022, Mississippi was awarded $3,038,018[2] via federal Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) funds to implement evidence-based home visiting services. The state delivers voluntary home visiting services through Healthy Families Mississippi–an affiliate of Healthy Families America® (HFA), an evidence-based program that serves new and expectant parents. The program promotes child well-being, positive parent–child interactions, and family self-sufficiency, as well as increases school readiness.[3] Research shows the benefits of home visiting extend well beyond the family.

Several interrelated outcomes demonstrate the economic impact of home visiting programs

Reducing infant mortality benefits the future workforce

Mississippi has the highest infant mortality rate in the United States.[4] Home visiting can



play a role in disrupting this harmful trend. For example, in a study of Nurse-Family Partnership (NFP), children whose mothers received home visits during pregnancy and through child age 2 years were less likely to have died from preventable causes compared with their counterparts who did not receive services.[5] Given the dip in fertility rates and slower population growth,[6] reducing infant mortality is paramount for our state's future economy.

Early interventions cultivate cognitive development

The foundational skills needed for today's jobs are developed in the first five years of life.[7] In Mississippi, over 60 percent of young children are not prepared for kindergarten.[8] High-quality home visiting programs can provide parents with needed tools to help cultivate cognitive development–a primary determinant for academic success. For example, an HFA study found children of participating families showed improved cognitive development at 1 and 2 years old and demonstrated fewer problem behaviors. These early impacts led to success in school, with more children in gifted programs and fewer receiving special education services.[9]

Reducing child welfare involvement improves academic performance

In Mississippi, between 2016 and 2020, the number of newborn hospitalizations due to substance exposure before birth increased sharply, from 642 to 982.[10] While substance use does not always result in prenatal exposure, substance use is the leading contributor to children entering the Child Protective Services (CPS) system for child abuse/neglect—contributing to nearly half of the cases in Mississippi.[11] Home visiting has been found to reduce parental substance use and involvement with the CPS system. An evaluation of NFP showed that participation resulted in fewer CPS reports and substantiations in home-visited groups compared to those who didn't receive services.[12] Similarly, in a HFA study, mothers who received home visiting were less likely to engage in substance use, and their children were more likely to perform well academically.[13] Familial involvement with CPS, particularly if parental custody loss is a result, puts children at high risk of dropping out of school and not attending or graduating from college.[14]

Improving family financial stability yields profits

In Mississippi, 28 percent of children live in poverty (189,000)[15]–placing them at risk for poverty in adulthood.[16] High-quality home visiting has been shown to increase families' capacity to achieve financial stability. An NFP study found that the average participating family reduced their

use of welfare benefits by 10 percent each year compared to nonparticipants, which added up to $14,500 savings in the decade following the program.[17]

In addition, some home visiting models have found a positive return on investment (ROI). For example, for HFA, total benefits outweighed program costs, yielding a "profit" to society of $2,286 for each participant served.[18]

Mississippi policymakers must increase home visiting access and strengthen investments

In Mississippi, there are approximately 176,890 families with children under 5.[19] Of these, an estimated 43,680 highest-priority families could benefit from home visiting.[20] In FY 2021, MIECHV-funded home-visiting programs served approximately 656 Mississippi families.[21] This means that less than two percent of families who could benefit from home visiting currently receive it. In fact, in 2021, the program only served 12 of the 82 counties in Mississippi.[22]



Conclusion

Home visiting is a key component to the future success of Mississippi. The number of families served via home visiting programs is minuscule when considering the need across the state. Increasing access and investments in these programs across our state helps to put our children and families on a strong path, unhampered by health and social barriers—increasing their potential to fully participate in building a thriving and prosperous state.

Endnotes

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