COUNCIL FOR A
STRONG AMERICA

REPORT

Cultivating Success though Evidence-Based Home Visiting Programs in New Mexico

Voluntary home visiting programs help improve the economy, increase public safety, and make our nation more secure



Acknowledgements

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Author:
Tawana Bandy-Fattah, Former Research Deputy Director

Contributors:
Sandra Bishop, Ph.D., Chief Research Officer
McKenzie Richardson, New Mexico State Lead

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Only 6%

of New Mexico families who could benefit from home visiting were served

Summary

Growing up in a stable and stimulating environment with nurturing caregivers is paramount for optimal childhood development. For new and expectant parents who face barriers or challenges (such as low incomes or substance use issues) that may limit their capacity to provide the needed nurturing and environmental conditions, voluntary home visiting programs offer support and resources—such as prenatal care, parental coaching, developmental screenings, and community resource linkages—which can help prevent an array of negative outcomes.

What is Voluntary Home Visiting?

Home visiting is a term that encapsulates a variety of voluntary programs that employ trained professionals (e.g., nurses, social workers, or parent educators) to support pregnant mothers and new parents—through home visits—to promote infant and child health, foster educational development and school readiness, and help prevent child abuse and neglect. These programs also connect parents to resources within their community. Ultimately, these programs can help put families on the path to self-sufficiency and children on the path to success.



In fiscal year (FY) 2022, New Mexico was awarded $3,439,426 via federal Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) funds to implement evidence-based home visiting services.[1]

Two home visiting models are delivered with MIECHV funds in New Mexico:[2]

Nurse-Family Partnership (NFP):[3] Promotes healthy pregnancies for low-income, first-time mothers. Mothers are enrolled during pregnancy, with services continuing until the child reaches 2 years of age. Trained nurses promote improved child health and development, family economic self-sufficiency, and encourage mother-child attachment and healthy parenting choices.

Parents as Teachers (PAT):[4] Serves families with high needs, such as families with low incomes, families at risk of child abuse, and children with special needs. PAT focuses on enhancing parenting knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors, and promoting family well-being, to positively impact children's development.

Home visiting programs were also funded through federal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) funds, as well as

> “High-quality home visiting programs give the entire family unit a better chance of escaping poverty and becoming self-sufficient. Investing in these programs creates positive economic benefits and strengthens both today’s and tomorrow’s workforce.”



Thomas Arenberg
Retired Managing Director of Accenture

state funds.[5] State-funded models include First Born and Partners for a Healthy Baby/Nurturing Parents.

Collectively, New Mexico home visiting programs served 6,363 families in fiscal year (FY) 2022.[6] This number, however, represents only six percent of the 108,500 New Mexico families with children under six years old who could benefit from home visiting.[7]

The Economic Case for Home Visiting in New Mexico

Improving self sufficiency through home visiting

Children growing up in impoverished households, including 29 percent of young children in New Mexico,[8] are more likely to experience increased residential mobility, attend less well-funded schools, have an unemployed parent, and live in neighborhoods with fewer resources. The parents of these children have fewer resources at their disposal and, as a consequence, provide fewer cognitively-stimulating materials in the home, and make fewer investments in their children’s education.[9] These experiences can have a lasting effect, making it difficult for these children to escape poverty once they reach adulthood.[10] Increasing families’ capacity to achieve financial stability can help disrupt the cycle of intergenerational poverty. High-quality home visiting has been shown to have a positive impact on family incomes. By helping parents set and achieve education and employment goals, home visiting programs can increase parents’ earnings and reduce their reliance on public assistance. For example, an NFP study found that the average participating family reduced their use of welfare benefits by 10 percent each year compared to the control group, which added up to $14,500 in the decade following the program.[11]

Cultivating academic success through home visiting

Children develop foundational skills needed for the workforce in the first five years of life.[12]

Children from disadvantaged backgrounds are more likely to experience special education placement, grade retention, and school drop out[13]—potentially hampering future opportunities to excel in the workforce.[14] Home visiting can help offset these challenges through

early education.[15] For example, participation in the PAT program resulted in higher scores in reading, math, and language at kindergarten entry and in later grades.[16] In addition, some programs have found a positive return on investment (ROI). For example, NFP yields net economic benefits (benefits minus costs) of $2,783 per family served.[17]

The Public Safety Case for Home Visiting in New Mexico

Home visiting can prevent child maltreatment and child welfare involvement

In FY 2021, 5,964 New Mexico children experienced child abuse or neglect,[18] and nearly 3,000 were placed in foster care.[19] Child maltreatment and involvement with child welfare can have serious and long-lasting implications for children's overall well-being, including later criminal activity.[20] While most child maltreatment victims do not become criminals, experiencing neglect or abuse increases the risk of future involvement in crime. For example, neglected children are almost five times more likely to be arrested as juveniles, twice as likely to be arrested as adults, and three times more likely to be arrested for a violent crime as those who did not experience neglect.[21]

Evidence-based home visiting programs provide a solution to help combat both child maltreatment and child welfare involvement.[22] The longest-running home visiting study followed NFP participants and demonstrated that, by age 15, children in NFP had half as many verified incidents of maltreatment as children in the control group who didn't participate.[23] Another program, Family Connects®, resulted in 39 percent fewer investigations for suspected child abuse and neglect among participating families than other families in the same community.[24] Less than one percent of New Mexico families participating in home visiting programs had substantiated reports of child maltreatment.[25]

> "Maltreated children are five times more likely to be arrested as juveniles. Home visiting gives young parents and caregivers essential resources to raise their children in a nurturing environment and set them up for success."
>
> 
>
> **Adan Mendoza**
> Sheriff of Santa Fe County

Home visiting can help curb substance misuse

Having a substance use disorder is a major risk factor for child maltreatment, as it can negatively impact a parent's capacity to function as a nurturing caregiver and meet their children's fundamental needs.[26] In New Mexico, 36 percent of foster care placements resulted, in part, from parental substance misuse.[27] Parental substance abuse also



heightens the risk of their children developing substance abuse problems and experiencing juvenile delinquency in adolescence and young adulthood. [28]

Long-term follow-up studies have demonstrated the preventive impact of home visiting on substance use. For example, in an NFP study of families with low household income, participating mothers were found to have had less impairment from alcohol and substance misuse.[29] Similarly, in an Healthy Families America (HFA) study, mothers who received home visiting were less likely to engage in substance use than nonparticipants.[30]

The National Security Case for Home Visiting in New Mexico

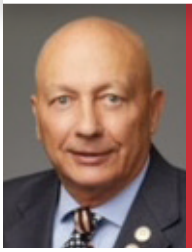
Preventing early child health problems

In New Mexico, 36 percent of children are either obese or overweight.[31] Nearly three-fourths of New Mexico youth are ineligible for military service[32] and obesity is a major disqualifier. Preventing these health disparities in the early years is paramount for national security,[33] and home visiting can play a role: PAT participants improved consumption of fruits and vegetables, and parents improved food preparation, compared to nonparticipants.[34]

Home visiting can address mental health issues

The mental health of children is directly connected to their parent's mental health.[35] In New Mexico, 300,000 adults have a mental health condition, more than three times the population of Sante Fe. Similarly, 32,000 children in New Mexico have depression.[36] A history of mental health disorder can disqualify future enlistment in the military.[37] Home visiting programs can play an important role in screening for mental illness, providing mental health resources and referrals, and teaching coping mechanisms.[38] For example, in FY 2022, of New Mexico mothers participating in home visiting, 22 percent were found to have symptoms of postpartum depression; 98 percent of these mothers were referred for depression service and nearly 50 percent engaged in the services.[39] In an HFA study of approximately 700 mothers and their children, mothers who received home visiting services and referral information reported fewer depressive symptoms.[40]

> "Obesity is a major disqualifier for the three-fourths of New Mexico youth who are ineligible for military service. Home visiting programs are a powerful tool to foster healthy eating habits early in a child's life"



Brigadier General (Ret.) Jack R. Fox
U. S. Army

Conclusion

Home visiting is a key component to the future success of New Mexico's children and families. As summarized above, these programs convey myriad benefits to participants. Further, benefits can accrue early in program participation. For example, 97 percent of New Mexico mothers in home visiting programs received prenatal care before the third trimester, compared to 88 percent of pregnant women statewide.[41] Even families who participate in home visiting for just two months receive referrals to other services and complete some program goals.[42]

Still, there are gaps in home visiting access and availability. One issue contributing to this problem is the failure to spend Medicaid dollars available.[43] Improving access will also require continuing expansion of the home visiting workforce. To attempt to address these needs, our state is introducing new evidence-based home visiting models in FY24—Family Connects®, Safe Care Augmented, Healthy Families America, and Child First. Greater investments in home visiting programs across our state would help 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. Increased resources would help more families build foundations for future success and help reduce the lifelong impact of early childhood adversity. Ultimately, home visiting programs create stronger families and strengthen the fabric of our communities, which helps increase public safety and national security and reduce burdens on taxpayers throughout New Mexico.

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