



Preventing Crime Through Voluntary Home Visiting

New Mexico's voluntary home-visiting program prevents crime by reducing child abuse and neglect

Acknowledgements

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Fight Crime: Invest in Kids

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More than **7,600**
children in New
Mexico experienced
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in 2014.

380

Number of school
classrooms that amount
of children fills

Every year, around 7,600 children in New Mexico experience abuse or neglect, most often by a parent or guardian.¹ These traumatic experiences have immediate repercussions for New Mexico's children and communities, as well as long-term impacts on its criminal justice system; sadly, **children who are abused or neglected are twice as likely to become involved in crime** later in life.²

The good news is that child abuse and neglect is preventable. Evidence-based home-visiting programs that work with at-risk parents during the first years of their child's life have been shown to cut child abuse and neglect and future crime by 50 percent or more. They have also been shown to improve children's health and development and families' economic self-sufficiency. Increasing investments in New Mexico's home visiting program is one of

the best steps we can take to protect children and prevent crime.

The costs of crime are unsustainable in New Mexico

While crime rates have fallen over the past two decades, there are still 13,700 violent crimes and 77,000 property crimes committed in New Mexico each year.³ The human and fiscal costs of this crime are unsustainable. In total, there are more than 7,200 adults incarcerated in state prisons and close to 16,500 on probation or parole at a cost of roughly \$300 million per year.⁴

New Mexico is currently making improvements to its prison system amidst concerns over a rising inmate population.⁵ However, improving our prison system is necessary but not sufficient: we must address the root of the problem by preventing crime in the first place.



Child abuse and neglect: A risk factor for future crime

More than 7,600 children in New Mexico experienced abuse or neglect in 2014.⁶ That's enough children to fill 380 school classrooms in our state.⁷ The actual number of child abuse and neglect cases is likely much higher due to underreporting.

Most child abuse and neglect occurs in families, particularly in those with young children. Nine out of ten cases involve parents, and in New Mexico, twice as many children under the age of one experience abuse or neglect compared to children of other ages.⁸

Being neglected or abused increases the risk of future involvement in crime. For example, research shows that roughly half of adolescents who had been arrested for delinquency were abused or neglected earlier in their lives.⁹ Another study found that **children who were abused or neglected were twice as likely to commit a crime by age 19** compared to similar children who hadn't been abused or neglected.¹⁰

What is voluntary home visiting?

Many child abuse and neglect cases are preventable. Guidance and support provided by trusted advisors to parents during pregnancy through the first few years of a child's life can help prevent child abuse and neglect.

Parenting is the biggest challenge many people will face. For single and poor teen parents, this challenge is amplified. Voluntary home visiting programs give young, at-risk parents (often single mothers) counseling, coaching, and support on a range of crucial parenting skills from in utero to age two or three.

During a home visit, a nurse or trained educator helps parents learn about the early physical and emotional development of the child. They also provide families with tools to manage stress and anxiety, resources for ensuring the child's safety, and techniques to effectively guide a toddler away from problem behaviors.

Voluntary home visiting can cut abuse and neglect in half and reduce crime

Research shows that voluntary home visiting programs can decrease child abuse and neglect. For example, a randomized study found that the **Nurse-Family Partnership home visiting program cut child abuse and neglect by 50 percent among participating families.**¹¹ Another home visiting program, Every Child Succeeds, found that children in the control group were 2.5 times more likely to die in infancy than those who received home visiting—which child abuse and neglect can play a role in.¹²

The study of the Nurse-Family Partnership (NFP) also showed that by age 15, children in

Voluntary Home Visiting Participation By Locality

Less than 6% of New Mexico's 0- to 3-year-olds have access to a home-visiting program.

County	Slots Available*	Child Population Age 0-3	Percent of Population Served
BERNALILLO	1,011	27,612	4%
CATRON	0	90	0%
CHAVES	30	3,180	1%
CIBOLA	87	1,128	8%
COLFAX	30	411	7%
CURRY	59	2,704	2%
DE BACA	3	65	5%
DONA ANA	903	9,226	10%
EDDY	25	2,418	1%
GRANT	114	1,044	11%
GUADALUPE	69	153	45%
HARDING	0	16	N/A
HIDALGO	50	181	28%
LEA	92	3,793	2%
LINCOLN	24	571	4%
LOS ALAMOS	60	555	11%
LUNA	228	1,059	22%

County	Slots Available*	Child Population Age 0-3	Percent of Population Served
MCKINLEY	300	3,804	8%
MORA	5	147	3%
OTERO	64	2,937	2%
QUAY	57	N/A	N/A
RIO ARRIBA	86	1,597	5%
ROOSEVELT	20	958	2%
SAN JUAN	205	6,285	3%
SAN MIGUEL	43	817	5%
SANDOVAL	175	N/A	N/A
SANTA FE	254	4,986	5%
SIERRA	71	313	23%
SOCORRO	90	313	29%
TAOS	222	1,096	20%
TORRANCE	84	513	16%
UNION	3	145	2%
VALENCIA	91	3,123	3%
NEW MEXICO	4,555	87,627	5%

*Includes roughly 710 privately-funded slots; Most slots are by family; 431 are by child; Statewide capacity as of 11/1/16

Source: New Mexico Home Visitation Collaborative; Population data from the New Mexico Children, Youth and Families Department 2016

families not in the program had twice as many arrests, and by age 19, they had more than twice as many convictions. These results were concentrated among the girls in the program. The **young women who did not receive NFP services averaged nine times more convictions** than the young women who received NFP.¹³

Voluntary home visiting has additional benefits

High-quality voluntary home visiting programs also impact children's health and development as well as families' economic self-sufficiency. For example, a study found that mothers who received home visits through Early Head Start increased their

earnings by \$3,600 a year, likely because the program helped connect them with education and jobs.¹⁴ Another study of the Parents as Teachers home visiting program found promising impacts on parenting practices and school readiness.¹⁵ In addition, a recent study of New Mexico's First Born program found that participating families were one-third less likely to visit the emergency room.¹⁶

The savings add up. As a result of crime reductions as well as other outcomes, a cost-benefit analysis found that high quality home-visiting programs achieve average savings of \$5,000-\$6,000 for each family served.¹⁷

Home visiting in New Mexico

The typical home visiting participant in New Mexico is Latina, in her early 20s, and low-income.¹⁸ This is a similar demographic to the women who took part in the Denver, Colorado study of the Nurse-Family Partnership, which found positive impacts on children's development at age four.¹⁹

New Mexico's home visiting programs include Early Head Start, Family Spirit, First Born, Nurse-Family Partnership, Parents as Teachers, and Partners for a Healthy Baby.²⁰ Early Head Start, Nurse-Family Partnership, and Parents as Teachers are all approved as evidence-based models by federal standards and the First Born program, which was founded in New Mexico, is currently undergoing a rigorous evaluation to become an evidence-based model.²¹

In 2016, home-visiting programs in New Mexico reached roughly 4,500 children and families—less than six percent of the state's age 0-3 population.²² More than 700 of these slots were privately funded. Greater state investments are necessary to increase participation in home visiting and reduce child abuse and neglect across New Mexico. At the federal level,

LESS THAN

6%



of children ages
0-3 in New Mexico
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home-visiting
programs in 2016

reauthorizing the Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) program is also necessary to sustain and increase evidence-based home-visiting programs in New Mexico.

In addition, improved coordination and data sharing between Child Protective Services (CPS) and Early Childhood Services would help ensure that there is accurate data on whether home visiting is achieving reductions in child abuse and neglect.²³

Conclusion

Investing in voluntary home visiting will improve public safety. Our state and nation cannot turn a blind eye to the fiscal, public safety and human costs of child abuse and neglect. Most cases of abuse and neglect are preventable if we take a proactive approach that utilizes proven, evidence-based practices. State and federal policymakers must act decisively to support the continuum of these proven voluntary home visiting programs. Doing so will dramatically reduce the number of children who are abused and neglected in our state, and ultimately prevent involvement in the criminal justice system.

Endnotes

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