



Parenting Works

The Public Safety and Economic Benefits of Home Visiting

Acknowledgements

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The birth of a child presents new opportunities and challenges for families. The challenges are often exacerbated for families who face difficult circumstances—such as poverty, unemployment, or single parenthood—and those who have few positive parenting role models to look to for guidance.

That's why voluntary home visiting programs have been proven to be so powerful—they offer mentorship from a trained educator, from pregnancy into the first few years of a child's life, using the simple logic that parenting works. Through periodic home visits, parents are equipped with the tools and skills they need to stimulate their child's development and avoid harmful parenting practices that can result in neglect or abuse.

Home visiting also has unexpected benefits that extend well beyond the family. High-quality programs improve public safety by reducing child abuse and neglect and

“ We're talking about a simple investment—coaching parents early on—that pays incredible long-term dividends.”



Douglas M. Baker, Jr.
Chairman & CEO, Ecolab Inc.

preventing involvement in crime. They also strengthen the economy by fostering families' economic independence, helping children become productive adults, and saving up to five dollars for every dollar invested. When at-risk parents take advantage of the resources available in voluntary home visiting, entire communities benefit.

The Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) Program

The MIECHV program provides federal funding to states and localities to implement evidence-based home visiting programs tailored to their communities.¹ As of 2015, the MIECHV program enrolled more than 145,500 parents and children—extending the reach of state home visiting programs that were previously serving roughly 400,000 families.² MIECHV was most recently reauthorized with bipartisan support in 2015. If Congress does not act this fall, however, this vital program will expire.

The home visiting programs funded by MIECHV offer home-based coaching on a voluntary basis to vulnerable parents. Families receiving services gain access to

a trained educator—often a nurse, other health professional, or social worker—who visits their home on a weekly or monthly basis.³ While services differ by program model, the typical home visit includes coaching parents on child safety and development and as well as developing parents' own goals and actions in relation to healthy behaviors, education and employment.

Since its inception, MIECHV has enabled states to expand evidence-based programs that suit the needs of their communities. The first national evaluation of MIECHV found that states are successfully identifying communities and families with the highest need, developing a skilled home visiting workforce, and creating referral and data systems that meet the needs of local programs.⁴

My parent educator was the first positive influence in my life

A story from a home visiting participant in Missouri

I didn't know what good parenting looked like until I started working with a parent educator from Parents as Teachers. As a child, my mom went back and forth from being too lax, to overly strict. If I got in trouble, my discipline was getting punched in the face. My friends aren't good parents, either, and drugs have been a big part of that. My parent educator was the first positive influence in my life. I know she will come to the house every couple weeks and I am motivated to be a better parent because she has shown me how. She taught me to be consistent and how to discipline without spanking or shouting. She also supports my sobriety. She brings me books to read to my child and taught me how to read to her, and I know that makes a difference in her school readiness skills. In my own life, my parent educator encouraged me to build relationships that resulted in my regaining employment. I have made a lot of mistakes in my life but being a good mom and helping my child develop to her full potential will not be one of them. —Sharon Centralia, Parents as Teachers program participant, Missouri

Several features make MIECHV a stand-out federal program:

Local choice and flexibility: States can choose from close to 20 approved program models to suit the needs of their communities.⁵ Different programs are geared towards different populations. For example, the Family Connects program operates in four rural counties in North Carolina, while the Early Intervention Program for Adolescent Mothers is designed for young African American and Latina mothers.⁶ Other programs differ by goals and age range. The Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters program is designed for three- to five-year-olds and emphasizes at-home preschool instruction, while the Nurse-Family Partnership program provides health-centered coaching from pregnancy to age two.⁷

Targeted to at-risk populations: States conduct needs assessments in order to target services toward at-risk communities.⁸ The majority of families enrolled in MIECHV are below the federal poverty level (currently \$20,420 for a family of three), and half are in deep poverty.⁹ One-fifth are pregnant teens. The typical participant is a young mother under the age of 25 who is single and living in poverty.¹⁰ Many programs include fathers in home visits, with specific engagement strategies.

Evidence-based programs and proven outcomes: MIECHV directs 75 percent of funding to evidence-based home visiting program models, and up to 25 percent to program models that are undergoing rigorous evaluation. To qualify as evidence-based, programs must be research-based and rigorously studied, in existence for at least three years, and run by a credible national organization.¹¹ Once a program

“A parent is a child’s first coach. Let’s help them also be their child’s best coach.”



Bonnie Blair

Five-time Olympic Gold Medalist and Mom

model is selected, states must demonstrate progress toward outcomes in at least four of six areas. An evaluation of programs from 2012 to 2014 found that more than two-thirds of states achieved improvements across all benchmark areas.¹²

Home Visiting: A Crime-Prevention Strategy

Children under the age of three are most at risk for abuse or neglect.¹³ One in seven families who enroll in federally-funded home visiting programs report a history of child maltreatment, and many more have factors that put them at risk for abuse or neglect.¹⁴ The experience of neglect or abuse as a child is associated with several negative outcomes throughout life, including being twice as likely to commit a crime by age 19.¹⁵

High-quality home visiting programs can prevent later crime by preventing child abuse and neglect. The longest-running study of home visiting followed participants in the Nurse-Family Partnership (NFP) program over two decades, and

demonstrated that, by age 15, children in NFP had half as many verified incidents of child abuse and neglect.¹⁶

Moreover, by age 19, **children in the control group had twice as many arrests and more than twice as many convictions** than their counterparts who received home visits.¹⁷ The results were concentrated among the girls in the program: young women who did not participate in NFP averaged nine times more convictions than young women who participated.

The study also found that home visiting reduced crime among parents. Specifically, mothers in the control group had more than three times as many criminal convictions 15 years after the program compared to mothers who participated in NFP. Control group mothers also spent more time in jail.¹⁸

The Return on Investment From Home Visiting

A study of the Nurse-Family Partnership (NFP) found the program is expected to eliminate the need for 4.8 million person-months of child Medicaid coverage.²² This study also found the program is expected to reduce estimated spending on TANF by \$250 million, on food stamps by \$540 million, and on Medicaid by \$2.2 billion, which accrue to a total of \$3.0 billion. By comparison, NFP costs our nation roughly

“If we can prevent child abuse and neglect, that’s a win for families and will mean less crime in the years to come.”



Sheriff Rand Henderson
Montgomery County, Texas

\$1.6 billion, thus the program results in \$1.4 billion cost savings nationwide.

There are also immediate healthcare savings that result from high-quality home visiting programs. Eighty-five percent of children enrolled in a federally-funded home visiting program are insured through Medicaid or the Children’s Health Insurance Program.²³ Home visiting programs cut public spending on healthcare by reducing:

- **Low birth weight:** A randomized trial of Healthy Families New York found that

Estimated welfare savings due to Nurse Family Partnership

\$ 250 million
TANF

\$ 540 million
Food Stamps

\$ 2.2 billion
Medicaid



Parenting Works.

Children's earliest experiences impact how their brains connect and process information throughout life. During pregnancy and infancy, the brain is developing faster than it will at any other point in the lifespan, forming more than one million new neural connections per second.¹⁹ Disruption to this process can have lifelong consequences.

"Toxic stress" is one of those disruptions. Toxic stress is the repeated, prolonged experience of heightened heart rate, blood pressure, and stress hormones; in other words, it's a chronic "fight-or-flight" response. The stress damages both the developing brain and body in a way that can have irreversible effects on physical and mental functioning throughout life.

Toxic stress can result from experiences ranging from parental substance abuse or mental health problems to environmental factors such as food insecurity or neighborhood or family violence; often called "Adverse Childhood Experiences" or ACEs.

Nearly three-quarters (70%) of children in low-income families who receive home visits have experienced one or more ACEs.²⁰

Because a positive relationship with a caregiver is the most important ingredient in children's development, adult behavior is often the reason and remedy for toxic stress. When parents alter their responses from "unreliable, inappropriate, or simply absent" to "sensitive and responsive", that can make the difference.²¹ Supportive parents can also buffer children from the effects of negative environmental factors that create toxic stress. Home visitors help parents make these changes, building positive interactions between mom and baby, and addressing problems such as financial stress, mental health issues, and substance abuse that put them at-risk of poor parenting.

mothers who participated in home visiting were roughly half as likely to have a baby born at a low birth weight compared to control group mothers (5 percent vs. 10 percent).²⁴ Low birth weight can accompany premature birth, which commonly results in an extended hospital or Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) stay, and can lead to lifelong health problems.²⁵

- **Emergency room visits and healthcare usage:** A randomized trial of New Mexico's First Born program showed that participants had 33 percent fewer emergency room visits, and were 41 percent less likely to frequent the doctor's office (defined by nine or more visits per year).²⁶
- **Infant mortality:** Home visiting can reduce infant mortality by helping

mothers have healthy pregnancies and helping parents adopt safe and positive parenting practices. A study of the Every Child Succeeds program in Cincinnati found that home visiting achieved a 60 percent reduction in infant mortality rates.²⁷ There are 5.82 infant deaths per 1,000 live births in the U.S.²⁸

Because of these demonstrated economic benefits, three communities are experimenting with funding home visiting programs through a "Pay for Success" model—in which private investors partner with governments to reap returns on programs that achieve the desired outcomes.²⁹

Home Visiting Improves the Educational and Workforce Outcomes of Two Generations

Studies show that high-quality home visiting programs improve parents' productivity in the short-term, and prepare children for educational success in the long-term.

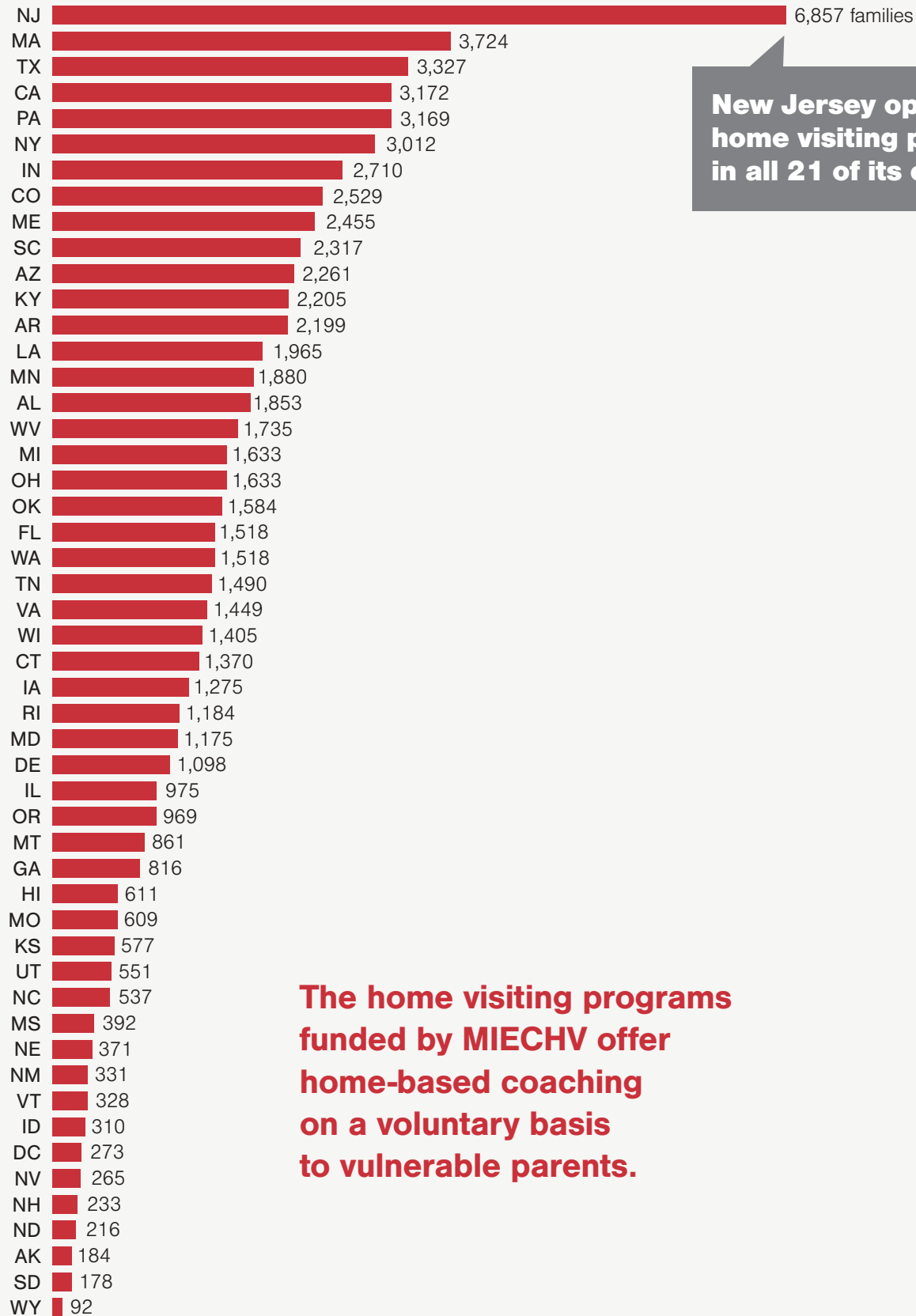
By helping parents set and achieve education and employment goals, home visiting programs can increase parents' earnings and reduce their reliance on welfare. For example, mothers who participated in the Early Head Start home visiting program boosted their average annual earnings by \$3,600 following the program.³⁰ Meanwhile, a study of the Nurse-Family Partnership home visiting program found that the average family reduced their welfare use by 10 percent each year compared to the control group, which added up to \$14,500 in the decade following the program.³¹

“We have a moral obligation to offer guidance to young parents who simply aren't prepared for the challenges of raising children.”



Dr. Stacy Spencer
Pastor of New Direction
Christian Church

Number of families enrolled in MIECHV by state

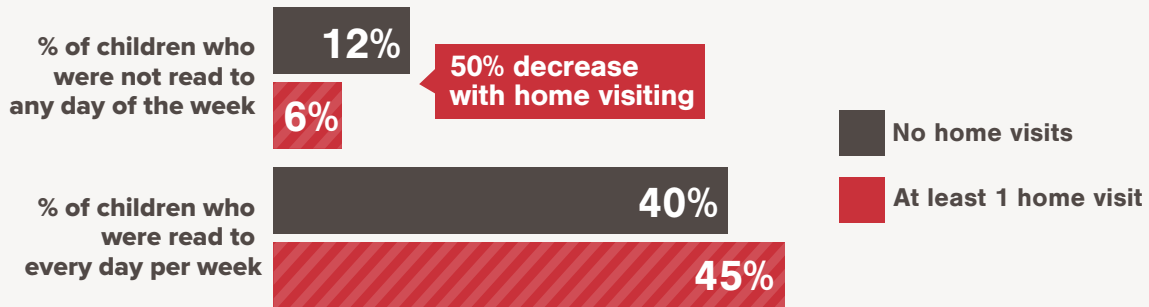


New Jersey operates home visiting programs in all 21 of its counties.

The home visiting programs funded by MIECHV offer home-based coaching on a voluntary basis to vulnerable parents.

Home visiting increases reading

Families in poverty who received one or more home visits read more often to their children compared to those who didn't receive a home visit.



Source: Council for a Strong America Analysis of the National Survey of Children Health Data (2011-2012).

Home visiting programs also equip parents to provide quality early learning experiences during a critical period of brain development—setting children up for success in school. For example, most home visitors encourage parents to speak and read more to their infants. This is important considering that, as early as age three, low-income children have vocabularies that are roughly half as large as their higher-income peers due to differences in the amount and quality of words their parents speak to them.³² This coaching makes a

difference. One study, for example, found that the Healthy Families America home visiting program achieved a 27 percent reduction in the proportion of first graders who needed special education.³³

In addition, to the degree that home visiting programs reduce low birth weight, child abuse and other early factors associated with long-term health problems, they contribute to adults who can be mentally and physically healthier and more productive.

Conclusion

Voluntary home visiting programs are based on a simple premise: parenting works. By coaching parents at a pivotal point in their lives, home visitors help at-risk parents provide children with a strong and stable upbringing and become self-sufficient. As a result, high-quality programs have benefits ranging from public savings and reductions in healthcare costs to less child abuse and neglect and crime reduction. Without reauthorization by Congress, MIECHV funding will expire on September 30, 2017—removing 145,500 at-risk parents and children from evidence-based home visiting programs.

Endnotes

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