



James Kegley



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Home Visiting Family Support Programs

Benefits of the Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting Program

Overview

The federally funded, locally administered Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting Program sponsors family support programs that are often called “home visiting” because they take place in the homes of at-risk families. These families often lack support, experience, and knowledge of basic parenting skills. Because children don’t arrive with instruction manuals, home visiting family support programs match parents with trained providers, such as nurses or parent educators.

These providers visit the homes of vulnerable families regularly (generally once or twice a month) from the time a mother is pregnant through the first few years of the child’s life. During this critical developmental period, parents receive support and knowledge about how to provide a safe and stimulating environment as well as information about how children grow and learn. In this voluntary program, motivated parents learn how to be successful in their new role. Children get off to a better, healthier start with parents who have the skills needed to raise them.

Research shows that these family support programs work and ultimately save money for taxpayers. A number of studies find evidence of effectiveness across a spectrum of family support programs in a variety of areas, including:

- Reduced health care costs.
- Reduced need for remedial education.
- Increased family self-sufficiency.

This fact sheet presents this evidence from across the country.

“ Voluntary home visiting helps at-risk children be better prepared for school. These programs also show concrete data for their return on investment. To keep our costs low, we must put our scarce state resources toward programs that prove their effectiveness. High-quality home visiting programs are supported by a wide array of citizen and public policy groups, from child advocacy organizations and major hospitals to the Iowa Association of Business & Industry and the National Lieutenant Governors Association...At a time when government dollars are scarce, it is more important than ever that the state invests in programs that produce results and savings for children, families and our economy.”

Lieutenant Governor Kim Reynolds, *Iowa* and Paul A. Gregoire, *a member of the Iowa Association of Business & Industry Board of Directors and Vice President of Emerson/Fisher Controls, joint op-ed*

Reduced health care costs

Mothers who participated in the Nurse-Family Partnership in Pennsylvania were 26 percent more likely to quit smoking while pregnant.¹

A home visiting program in North Carolina, Durham Connects, has been shown to pay for itself by the time a baby is 3 months old, through reductions in use of government medical assistance.²

Children who have strong bonds with their parents have better lifelong emotional health and a lower risk of later problems, including alcoholism, eating disorders, heart disease, cancer, and other chronic illnesses.³

“ Expanding Michigan’s home visiting efforts is one of the key strategies identified in the effort to reduce our infant mortality rates. We know that this program works at improving school readiness, and decreasing child mistreatment which is vital to ensuring our children have the right start in life.”

James K. Haveman, *director, Michigan Department of Community Health*

Reduced need for remedial education

In first grade, children who participated in Healthy Families New York were nearly twice as likely as other at-risk children to be able to follow directions, complete work on time, or work cooperatively with others—the foundational skills needed for a lifetime of learning.⁴

Parents that participated in Parents as Teachers were more likely to read aloud, tell stories, say nursery rhymes, and sing with their children. These activities are key to successful brain development and lifetime language skills.⁵

Increased self-sufficiency

Mothers who participated in Healthy Families Arizona were found to be five times more likely than other similar mothers to be enrolled in an education or a job training program.⁶

Mothers who have more years of formal education have higher family income, are more likely to be married, and have better-educated spouses. They work more but do not spend less time breastfeeding, reading to their children, or taking them on outings.⁷

Children of better-educated mothers also do better in math and reading at ages 7 and 8. Better-educated mothers are more likely to invest in their children through books, providing musical instruments, special lessons, or the availability of a computer.⁸

Through the Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting Program, home visiting family support programs are locally administered to meet the specific needs identified by each state. This critical, cost-saving program, set to expire in March, should be reauthorized to continue supporting stronger families and communities.

Endnotes

- 1 Meredith Matone, et al., "Home Visitation Program Effectiveness and the Influence of Community Behavioral Norms: A Propensity Score Matched Analysis of Prenatal Smoking Cessation," *BMC Public Health* 12 (2012), <http://www.biomedcentral.com/1471-2458/12/1016>.
- 2 Kenneth Dodge and Ben Goodman, "Durham Connects Impact Evaluation Final Report [to] Pew Center on the States," Washington (2012), p. 23. http://www.pewstates.org/uploadedFiles/PCS_Assets/2013/Durham_Connects_report.pdf.
- 3 R.L. Repetti, et al., "Risky Families: Social Environments and the Mental and Physical Health of Offspring," *Psychological Bulletin* 128 (2002): 330-36; and J.S. Middlebrooks and N.C. Audage, *The Effects of Childhood Stress on Health Across the Lifespan* (Atlanta: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, 2008), http://www.cdc.gov/ncipc/pub-res/pdf/childhood_stress.pdf.
- 4 Kristen Kirkland and Susan Mitchell-Herzfeld, "Evaluating the Effectiveness of Home Visiting Services in Promoting Children's Adjustment in School: Final Report to the Pew Center on the States" (Rensselaer, NY: New York State Office of Children and Family Services, 2012), http://www.pewstates.org/uploadedFiles/PCS_Assets/2013/School_Readiness_executive_summary.pdf.
- 5 Mary Wagner and Donna Spiker, *Multisite Parents as Teachers Evaluation: Experience and Outcomes for Children and Families*, SRI Project PO7283 (Menlo Park, CA: SRI International, 2001).
- 6 Craig LeCroy and Judy Krysik, "Randomized Trial of the Healthy Families Arizona Home Visiting Program," *Children and Youth Services Review* 33 (2011): 1761-66.
- 7 Pedro Carneiro, Costas Meghir, and Mattias Parey, "Maternal Education, Home Environments, and Child Development," *Journal of the European Economic Association* 11(S1) (2013): 28-29.
- 8 Carneiro et al., "Maternal Education." p. 23.

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