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The Case for Home Visiting

Strong Families Start with a Solid Foundation

Nothing transforms a home—and the people in it—quite like the arrival of a new baby. All parents need support during this transition. But for those facing the additional hurdles of being young, single or low income, help in making needed adjustments is all the more critical to ensuring that families grow and thrive.

Voluntary, home-based programs, also known as home visits, match parents with trained professionals to provide information and support during pregnancy and throughout their child's first three years. By helping parents learn how to care for their children and themselves, families reap the benefits: Children are safer, healthier, better prepared to learn and more likely to become successful adults.

A Bright Future Begins before Birth

Home visitors partner with expectant moms to encourage them to make regular prenatal care visits, quit smoking and drinking, and to eat a balanced diet—all behaviors that dramatically decrease their chances of having a low birthweight or substance-exposed baby. This support does not just save families the emotional cost of these dangerous and expensive conditions; it saves states money, too.



- Every low birthweight or preterm birth costs states between \$28,000 and \$40,000 in medical care and other related costs.¹
- One Cincinnati program found that infant death rates fell by 60 percent among home visiting participants.²
- In New York's Healthy Families home visiting program, mothers who received home visits were half as likely to deliver low birthweight babies as mothers who were not enrolled.³

Stronger Bonds, Better Lives

Home visiting helps parents find healthy solutions to stressful circumstances by connecting them with safe and stable housing and counseling for substance abuse or depression, as well as by teaching them to build positive, loving relationships with their children. Research shows

In this
Brief:

p. 1 A Bright Future Begins before Birth

p. 1 Stronger Bonds, Better Lives

p. 2 Healthy and Safe at Home

p. 2 A Foundation for Lifelong Learning

p. 2 Lasting Benefits Beyond the Home

that kids who have strong bonds with their parents have better lifelong emotional health and have a lower risk of later problems, including alcoholism, depression, eating disorders, heart disease, cancer and other chronic illnesses.⁴

- Studies have found that mothers who participated in home visits were more sensitive and supportive in interactions with their children,⁵ and they reported less stress than those in the control group.⁶
- One review of home visiting programs found significant improvements in parenting behaviors and attitudes.⁷

Healthy and Safe at Home

The ever-changing demands of raising an infant or toddler can prove challenging for even the best prepared parent. In 2008, there were more than 750,000 victims of child abuse or neglect in the United States, and almost half of the abuse-related fatalities were babies less than one year old.⁸ By helping parents understand their children's development, set realistic expectations for behavior and improve the safety of their homes, home visiting programs have been shown to cut incidences of child abuse and neglect in half.⁹ For example, by age two, children in one national home visiting program, the Nurse-Family Partnership (NFP), were 35 percent less likely to end up in the emergency room and 40 percent less likely to need treatment for injuries and accidents.¹⁰



A Foundation for Lifelong Learning

Babies start learning from the day they are born, but they need their parents to guide them. By teaching parents to stimulate their children's early learning, home visiting programs help build critical pre-literacy skills and improve achievement test scores.

- At age six, children who participated in the NFP home visiting program in Memphis had higher cognitive and vocabulary scores than those in the control group.¹¹
- At age nine, these children had higher grade point averages and achievement test scores in math and reading in first through third grades than those in the control group.¹²

Lasting Benefits Beyond the Home

By encouraging parents to continue their education, apply for jobs and improve relationships with the people in their lives, home visitors help families increase their ability to help themselves—and to build a lasting, stable future for their children. Fifteen years after their participation in a nurse home visiting program, mothers had:

- An 83 percent increase in employment by their child's fourth birthday;
- A 20 percent reduction reduction in welfare use; and
- A 46 percent increase in the father's presence in the household.¹³

Pew believes that proven programs supporting parents as they welcome a new baby into their lives are critical for laying the foundation for children's healthy development. States should invest in quality, evidence-based home visiting programs, that offer moms (and dads) access to information about their child's health and developmental and safety needs, as

well as resources to go back to school and find stable jobs. Fostering positive parenting skills and family responsibility and health today sows the seeds for safer, healthier children who are better prepared to learn tomorrow. And tax payers reap the benefit when many of our nation's costliest social problems—school failure, child abuse and welfare dependence—are prevented. ■

The Pew Home Visiting Campaign partners with policy makers and advocates to promote smart state investments in quality, voluntary home-based programs for new and expectant families. Learn more about our campaign at www.pewcenteronthestates.org/homevisiting

ENDNOTES

¹ Partnership for America's Economic Success, "Delivering Healthier Babies and Economic Returns," (December 2009). www.partnershipforsuccess.org/uploads/200912_00609PAESLongtermCostsBriefpressproof.pdf.

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⁴ R. L. Repetti, et al. "Risky Families: Family Social Environments and the Mental and Physical Health of Offspring," *Psychological Bulletin* 128 (2002): 330–366. See also 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).

⁵ Administration for Children and Families. *Making a Difference in the Lives of Infants and Toddlers and Their Families: The Impacts of Early Head Start* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2002). See also D. Olds, et al., "Home Visiting by Paraprofessionals and by Nurses: A Randomized Controlled Trial," *Pediatrics* 110 (2002): 486–49.

⁶ Administration for Children and Families, "Program Models in Early Head Start: Research to Practice Brief" (accessed April 7, 2010). www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/opre/ehs/research_practice/reports/program_models/program_models.pdf.

⁷ M. Sweet and M. Appelbaum. "Is Home Visiting an Effective Strategy? A Meta-Analytic Review of Home Visiting Programs for Families with Young Children," *Child Development* 75 (2004): 1435–1456.

⁸ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Children's Bureau, *Child Maltreatment 2008* (2010). www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/stats_research/index.htm#can.

⁹ Nurse Family Partnership, "Evidentiary Foundations of Nurse Family Partnership" (accessed April 7, 2010). www.nursefamilypartnership.org/assets/PDF/Policy/NFP-Evidentiary-Standards_4-28-09.

¹⁰ D. L. Olds, C. R. Henderson, and H. Kitzman, "Does Prenatal and Infancy Nurse Home Visitation Have Enduring Effects on Qualities of Parental Caregiving and Child Health at 25 to 50 Months of Life?," *Pediatrics* 93 (1994): 89–98.

¹¹ D. Olds, et al., "Effects of Nurse Home-Visiting on Maternal Life Course and Child Development: Age 6 Follow-Up Results of a Randomized Trial." *Pediatrics* 114 (2004): 1550–1559.

¹² D. Olds, et al., "Effects of Nurse Home-Visiting on Maternal Life Course and Child Development: Age 9 Follow-Up Results of a Randomized Trial." *Pediatrics* 120 (2007): e832–e845.

¹³ Nurse Family Partnership, "Evidentiary Foundations of Nurse Family Partnership" (accessed April 7, 2010). www.nursefamilypartnership.org/assets/PDF/Policy/NFP-Evidentiary-Standards_4-28-09.



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