

HOME VISITING

ACTION

- Cosponsor and pass the Education Begins at Home Act.

HISTORY

Home visitation programs refer to different model programs that provide in-home visits to targeted vulnerable or new families. Home visitation programs—either stand-alone programs or center-based programs—serve at least 400,000 children annually between the ages of 0 and 5. Eligible families may receive services as early as the prenatal stage. Because a child's early years are the most critical for optimal development and provide the foundation necessary for success in school and life, home visiting can make a lifetime of difference. Nurses, professionals, or other trained members of the community conduct home visits on a weekly, bimonthly, or monthly basis. Program goals include an increase in positive parenting practices, an improvement in the health of the entire family, an increase in the family's ability to be self-sufficient, and enhanced school readiness for the children.

Quality early childhood home visitation programs lead to several positive outcomes for children and families, including a reduction in child maltreatment. Annual data indicates that 40% of the nearly 900,000 children who have been substantiated as abused and neglected, but not removed from the home, never receive follow-up services. More widely available and implemented home visitation could help address this drastic shortcoming.

Home visitation services stabilize at-risk families by significantly affecting factors directly linked to future abuse and neglect. Research shows that families who receive at least 15 home visits have less perceived stress and maternal depression, while also expressing higher

levels of paternal competence. Home visitation programs may also reduce the disproportionality or overrepresentation of children and families of color, while improving outcomes for these families.

Senator Christopher Bond (R-MO) first began promoting home visiting as Missouri's governor when he signed the Early Childhood Education Act of 1984. This legislation helped expand the Parents as Teachers (PAT) programs in all state school districts. As the PAT model spread, it was later included in the reauthorization of the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act.

PAT joins several other model programs used by states across the country. States have decided to follow these different models depending on local needs and preferences. Other home visitation programs include Nurse-Family Partnership (NFP), Healthy Families America, Early Head Start, Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters (HIPPY), and the Parent-Child Home Program.

2006 LEGISLATION

Senator Bond introduced legislation in the 108th Congress—the Education Begins at Home Act—and again in the 109th Congress, S. 503. Representative Danny Davis (D-IL) introduced a companion bill, H.R. 3628, in the House of Representatives. Both bills had bipartisan support. Under the legislation, the Department of Health and Human Services would collaborate with the Department of Education to make grants available to all 50 states over a three-year period, authorizing \$400 million for states to implement home visiting programs. An additional \$50 million would be authorized over a three-year period for local partnerships that create or implement home visiting programs targeted to English-language learning families.



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Finally, an additional \$50 million would be targeted to reach military families through the Department of Defense. The legislation also seeks to strengthen the home visitation components of the Early Head Start program.

Under the legislation, each governor would designate a lead state agency to oversee and implement the state program. The states can use their grants to supplement—but not replace—current state funding. The legislation does not dictate which, or how many, home visiting models may be used. If a state currently lacks a home visitation program, the funds can be used to develop a program. A state's grant funding award would be based on the number of children ages 5 and younger living in the state, with no state receiving more than \$20 million a year. Applying states would submit a plan outlining their efforts to collaborate and coordinate among existing and new programs.

In September 2006, the U.S. House Subcommittee on Education Reform of the Committee on Education and Workforce held the first hearing on this legislation, *Perspectives on Early Childhood Home Visitation Programs*. The hearing was a bipartisan effort to highlight the cost-effectiveness and positive long-term social impact of home visiting programs. Before the 109th Congress adjourned, the legislation had 67 cosponsors in the House; the Senate bill had 19.

KEY FACTS

- In 2004, an estimated 3 million cases of child abuse and neglect were reported and referred for investigation to state and local child protective service agencies because family members, professionals, or other citizens were concerned about their safety and well-being. After follow-up assessments, officials were able to substantiate 872,000 of these cases.
- Of the 872,000 children determined to be abused or neglected, 59.4% received follow-up services. In other words, 40% of child victims did not receive follow-up services. Of the children who were reported abused or neglected, but their cases were not substantiated, 27.3% received follow-up services.
- Of the estimated 1,490 child deaths in 2004, 81% of child victims were younger than age 4. Another 11.5% were between the ages of 4 and 7.
- Of the perpetrators of child maltreatment, 78.5% were parents.
- A study of the Missouri-based PAT home visiting program examined children enrolled in the program and found that by age 3, the children were significantly

more advanced in language, problem-solving, and intellectual and social abilities than children in comparable groups.

- A study of the Nurse-Family Partnership showed there was a 79% reduction in child maltreatment among at-risk families compared to other families in a control group. That same study also indicated a number of other benefits in the areas of health, employment, and behavior.
- Healthy Families America exists in more than 450 communities; Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters is in 167 sites in 26 states; the Parent-Child Home Program is located in 137 sites nationally and 10 sites internationally; Early Head Start serves more than 62,000 children in 7,000 sites; and Parents as Teachers (PAT) is located in all 50 states and serves more than 400,000 children.
- Research shows that participating children have improved rates of early literacy, language development, problem solving, and social awareness. These children also demonstrate higher rates of school attendance and scores on achievement and standardized tests.
- Studies have shown that families who receive home visiting are more likely to have health insurance, seek prenatal and wellness care, and have their children immunized.
- Research has shown that by reducing abuse and neglect, home visitation programs can reduce juvenile delinquency and ultimately save taxpayers almost \$53 billion annually.

Sources for statistical information are provided in the online version of this fact sheet. See www.cwla.org/advocacy/2007legagenda.htm.

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