



# Voluntary Home Visiting

## Supporting Children and Families

Loving, nurturing relationships between parents and children are essential for young children's healthy development. Parents need support to provide the best foundation for their children. Voluntary home visiting programs can help parents create better opportunities for themselves and their families.

Parenting can also be extremely difficult for expectant and new parents experiencing the stresses of

poverty, substance abuse, domestic abuse, or mental health challenges.

Voluntary home visiting programs can help. Home visitors provide practical information and support on a range of issues including maternal and child health, parent-child interactions, and early learning.

### Currently in Oregon:

**LESS THAN 20 PERCENT**

Home visiting programs reach **VERY FEW** eligible families.<sup>1</sup>

### Who Could Benefit:

**217,000 FAMILIES**

Of these families, **NEARLY 60,000** are low-income.<sup>2</sup>

**20 MONTHS**

Children from low-income families typically enter kindergarten nearly **2 YEARS BEHIND** wealthier peers in cognitive development.<sup>3</sup>

**41 PERCENT**

**ALMOST HALF** of children in foster care are ages 0–5.<sup>4</sup>

**NEARLY 5,000**

**THOUSANDS OF CHILDREN** ages 0–4 are victims of maltreatment.<sup>5</sup>

**10–15 PERCENT**

Emotional and behavioral disorders, often the result of trauma and toxic stress, affect **NEARLY 1 IN 6 CHILDREN**.<sup>6</sup>

**NEARLY 1 IN 4**

**NEARLY 25 PERCENT** of new mothers experience depression during and after pregnancy. Half of these mothers are still depressed when their child reaches 2 years old.<sup>7</sup>

# Benefits of Home Visiting

Supportive, loving relationships and stable environments are essential for healthy brain development. Negative experiences can have adverse effects on a young child’s developing brain. Children exposed to prolonged neglect or abuse, extreme poverty, parental substance abuse, severe maternal depression, or violence in the home or community experience toxic stress. This causes the body’s stress response to stay elevated, disrupting young children’s brain development. Toxic stress can lead to behavioral and emotional problems with lifelong effects.

Home visiting can disrupt negative early childhood experiences, and provides the greatest benefits to families with the most significant needs. While Oregon is making progress with important investments in home visiting programs, a lack of funding and capacity in the system means too many families lack access to these essential services.

As Oregon’s population becomes more ethnically and linguistically diverse, culturally specific home visiting has become increasingly necessary. For vulnerable families who live in rural communities, the challenge of receiving vital home visiting services is further complicated by lack of access to home visitors and increased driving time and costs.

## Home Visiting **INCREASES:**

- Optimal child development and health
- Confidence and competence of parents
  - School readiness for children

## Home Visiting **DECREASES:**

- Child abuse and neglect
- Maternal depression
- Low-weight births and other preventable childhood health conditions



## Oregon’s Home Visiting Programs<sup>8</sup>

	Counties	Families Served
<p><b>Early Head Start*</b></p> <p>A national evidence-based model serving low-income families through home-based and center-based services.</p>	<b>18–20<sup>9</sup></b>	<b>2,200<sup>10</sup></b>
<p><b>Family Support and Connections</b></p> <p>A program serving low-income families accessing Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF).</p>	<b>All 36</b>	<b>1,600</b>
<p><b>Healthy Families Oregon*</b></p> <p>An evidence-based model serving families at risk of child abuse and neglect.</p>	<b>35</b>	<b>3,300</b>
<p><b>Nurse Home Visiting*</b></p> <p>An array of programs serving low-income families and families with disabled children or chronic health conditions. Nurse-Family Partnership is evidence-based.</p>	<b>30</b>	<b>4,900</b>

\* These are evidence-based programs.

# Build the System

Voluntary home visiting programs are an essential element in a system of support, beginning with prenatal care, to ensure young children are developmentally and academically prepared for lifelong success. For Oregon's voluntary home visiting programs to better support families and improve outcomes for children, the programs must be effectively coordinated and aligned, and must be offered alongside a continuum of other parenting support and early learning programs.

## Some communities in Oregon are leading the way in building a coordinated system.

In Douglas, Lake, and Klamath counties, community partners are coming together to implement a coordinated referral system that connects expectant mothers and families with young children to early learning and parenting support services. Through relationships and dedicated time, partners have improved

communication between programs and are now working on an outreach plan to ensure all families know about the early childhood resources in the region.

In Linn, Benton, and Lincoln counties, the Family Connects program complements and strengthens existing community services and aims to provide nurse home visits to every family with a newborn. Family Connects is designed to support parents and other family members with newborn care, help respond to immediate needs for support and guidance, link families to community services, and help new parents connect with their infant to sustain healthy development and family well-being.



## Notable Progress Toward Building Oregon's Home Visiting System

- 1993** — **Oregon Legislature creates Healthy Families Oregon (formerly Healthy Start).** Program provides home visiting services to first-time parents.
- 2010** — **Oregon receives first Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) program grant.** Funds high-quality, evidence-based home visiting services as well as workforce development to strengthen the state's home visiting system.
- 2012** — **Oregon conducts statewide home visiting needs assessment.** Assessment finds that only a small fraction of eligible families receive home visiting services, and persistent racial and ethnic disparities exist in home visiting participation.
- 2015** — **Best Beginnings Committee established.** Created by the Early Learning Council to build on MIECHV progress to ensure better coordination and alignment across Oregon's multiple home visiting programs.
- 2016** — **With MIECHV funds, Oregon invests in the Michigan Infant Mental Health Endorsement (IMH-E®).** The purpose is to promote competencies in providing high-quality, culturally sensitive, relationship-focused infant and early childhood mental health services among home visiting and other early childhood and family support professionals.

# Policy Recommendations

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## Offer universal first home visits for all families.

All families can benefit from parenting support and connections to community resources. To improve the lives of children and families, Oregon can provide universal first home visits for all families. In a first home visit, families would receive crucial information about how to support their child's health and development, connect to community-based resources like parenting education and play-and-learn groups, and engage with longer-term home visiting programs for families who

need and want that service. Universal home visits have also been proven to reduce emergency room visits, improve mental health for mothers, and increase positive parenting. A state investment in universal first home visits will also help Oregon access significant federal funds through the Medicaid program.

## Invest in programs that strengthen parent-child bonds.

Programs and services offered by effective home visiting programs, Relief Nurseries, Healthy Families Oregon, and Oregon Parenting Education Hubs can help many more families. Additional funding for effective programs that keep children safe, increase positive parenting, and support intact families will reach more of the 129,000 young children in Oregon living at or

below 200 percent of the federal poverty threshold. Investing in these programs and services is a critical part of the continuum of services necessary for building partnerships with families to support healthy and on-track development for children.

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### Citations and Credits

- 1 Oregon Health Authority (2012). Oregon Home Visiting Needs Assessment Report.
- 2 National Home Visiting Resource Center (2018). Oregon State Profile.
- 3 Center on Enhancing Early Learning Outcomes (May 2014). Access to High-Quality Early Care and Education: Readiness and Opportunity Gaps in America.
- 4 Kids Count Data Book (2016).
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 National Institute of Mental Health.
- 7 Oregon Health Authority, Public Health Division (August 2010). Maternal Depression in Oregon.
- 8 Data comes from the Oregon Health Authority, Early Learning Division of the Oregon Department of Education, Oregon Department of Human Services and Oregon Association of Relief Nurseries.
- 9 National Head Start Association (2017). Oregon Head Start Profile.
- 10 Ibid.

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