



OHIO
CHILDREN'S
BUDGET
2022-2023



January
2021

ISSUE BRIEF

Voluntary Evidence-Based Home Visiting

Voluntary, evidence-based home visiting brings early childhood development and health professionals to new parents to help them cultivate strong, healthy relationships with their children, give children the emotional security required for healthy development and provide parents with the knowledge to understand their child's needs, as well as their own. For those who elect to participate in a home visiting program, providers regularly visit the homes of vulnerable families (typically once per month), starting while the mother is pregnant and continuing through the first few years of the child's life. During this critical period of physical, emotional, and cognitive development for young children, parents receive support and guidance on how to create a safe, stimulating environment that promotes growth and learning. Voluntary, evidence-based home visiting programs allow motivated parents to learn how to succeed in their new role and provide children a healthy start with their first and most important teachers—parents.

Policy

Ohio's voluntary, evidence-based home visiting programs include the federally funded Maternal Infant and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) program and the state-funded Help Me Grow program. Most evidence-based home visiting is administered through the Ohio Department of Health, but communities across the state have also invested in home visiting programs that are administered through various local agencies using private and public dollars. Ohio's voluntary home visiting program uses three evidence-based models: 1) Healthy Families America; 2) Nurse-Family Partnership; and 3) Parents as Teachers. Additionally, the state utilizes Moms & Babies First, Ohio's Black Infant Vitality Program.

Challenge

Governor DeWine made a bold commitment upon taking office to triple the number of families served in evidence-based home visiting. While progress has been made, in 2020 only 10,765 families were served by Help Me Grow representing an additional 1,115 families served compared to 2019.



Opportunity

Ohio has made an incredible effort over the past two years to strengthen and expand evidence-based home visiting services through the implementation of a historic state funding increase in the state FY20-21 budget. Previously, the Ohio Department of Health received \$19,980,226 annually to support the Help Me Grow program. In state FY20-21 this number increased to \$30,289,149 and \$39,292,281 respectively representing a nearly \$30 million increase over the biennium. Additionally, the program is supported by federal dollars including \$7.5 million from the Maternal, Infant and Early Childhood Home Visiting Program and \$2.4 million from the Maternal Child Health Block Grant. The historic increase in state funding was made by Governor DeWine to begin to deliver on his promise of tripling the number of families served by evidence-based home visiting in the state of Ohio. Under the Ohio Department of Health's leadership, vital investments have been implemented to strengthen the home visiting system and service delivery. Even considering the impact of COVID-19, an additional 1,115 families were served in 2020 compared to 2019 for a total of 10,765 families served in 2020. The home visiting footprint across the state of Ohio has also expanded to serve all but three counties as of 2020.

While the leadership and growth of Ohio's evidence-based home visiting services have been critical to the success of the program over the past biennium, in addition to weathering the pandemic with quick and decisive action to safely transition services and meet the needs of families, more pregnant women and young children need the lifeline that is home visiting now more than ever. Now is the time to lean into the goal of tripling the number of families served by evidence-based home visiting. This will require the maintenance of the historic investment seen during the last biennium, additional state investment to support growth and the leveraging of additional federal resources.

Support Child Well-Being: Budget Recommendation

- **Sustainability:** Preserve the annual state investment of \$39,292,281 to support current operations and capacity serving children and families across the state in evidence-based home visiting through the Ohio Department of Health Help Me Grow Program.
- **Expansion:** Expand evidence-based home visiting services to serve more eligible families by increasing the state investment in the Ohio Department of Health Help Me Grow program. Expansion requires financing beyond additional state funds. In order to fully realize the goal of tripling the number of families served, the Medicaid program must be leveraged so that eligible services can be reimbursed in a more cost-effective manner. The Ohio Departments of Medicaid and Health should continue to investigate and implement options for using Medicaid funding to support home visiting services during the upcoming biennium. Additionally, the federal financing structure for child welfare programming through Ohio's Family First Prevention Services Act plan will allow the use of Title IV-E funds for prevention programs such as evidence-based home visiting. This federal funding source should be coordinated and leveraged to utilize state funds more and Medicaid financing to reach more families.
- **Equity:** Continue to evaluate programs from an equity lens and utilize data to make policy choices and investments that eliminate barriers to access and the impacts of COVID-19 based on race, rural geography and age of the child.

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Published: January, 2021

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