

Home Visiting Task Force Vision for Home Visiting in Illinois

Note: the following statement was adopted by the Home Visiting Task Force and Home Visiting Task Force Executive Committee in July 2015.

Illinois has long valued evidence-based home visiting programs and is recognized as a leading state in the country for these efforts. Over the past three decades, Illinois has reflected this value by developing a robust statewide home visiting system that cuts across agencies and funding streams, demonstrating effective collaborations from the highest levels of government to community-based collaborations on the ground. The Home Visiting Task Force (HVTF), a standing committee of the Illinois Early Learning Council, is a diverse, collaborative group that brings this system together. Long-term goals of the HVTF are to expand access to evidence-based home visiting programs for all at-risk children; improve the quality of home visiting services; and increase coordination between home visiting programs at the state and local levels, as well as between home visiting and all other publicly-funded services for families. The HVTF also serves as the advisory body for Illinois' federal Maternal, Infant and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) Program funded by the US Department of Health and Human Services.

The HVTF is a forum for the cycle of program, policy, and research that is essential to ensuring that state and federal public policy is informed by the programs on the ground and reflects the research being conducted. Bringing together a diverse group of stakeholders representing all three of these components has greatly benefitted the home visiting system. The HVTF's vision for home visiting in Illinois is informed by this strong, ongoing collaboration.

The Illinois home visiting system embraces the State's early childhood vision of every child entering kindergarten safe, healthy, ready to succeed, and eager to learn. By offering services that pair families with trained professionals who provide vital information and support, high-quality home visiting programs represent an effective and efficient strategy to improve the developmental trajectory of all children, particularly those who are most at risk for poor health, educational, economic and social outcomes. These services use evidence-based, intensive, outcome-driven models that promote positive parent-child attachment; strengthen parental capacity; provide developmental screening, monitoring, and referrals; and provide linkages to community resources and services. In addition, they are culturally and linguistically responsive, voluntary, and accessible. Outcomes of these services include improved maternal and child health, reduced risk of child abuse and neglect, improved self-sufficiency, and increased school readiness. Home visiting programs are recognized as both a preventative public health strategy, and as an integral part of a continuum of early childhood services for families beginning prenatally.

Funders of home visiting in Illinois have committed to continuously assessing the needs of the system, to being responsive in addressing the State's diverse geographic and demographic realities, to supporting the State's Birth to Five Program Standards, and to fostering needed innovations. As home visiting programs have expanded across the state, the public and private stakeholders in Illinois' home visiting system have sought to ensure the quality and fidelity of the services that are offered to families, and the presence of a skilled workforce.

Under leadership from the Home Visiting Task Force, the Illinois home visiting system continues to advance the quality of the services offered to meet the State’s early childhood vision. In order to guarantee that programs are reaching the children and families most at-risk and are supported by a statewide model for continuous quality improvement, policymakers have been challenged to make further investments in these vital supports for Illinois’ families and to create a universal system to provide supports to all newborns and their families. We envision that a majority of the funding for home visiting will be dedicated to those programs that have been designated as “evidence based” by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services’ Administration for Children & Families, or can demonstrate they are taking steps to meet those rigorous evidentiary standards, with some funding being reserved for innovative, promising approaches and strategies. The funders of Illinois home visiting programs should continue to develop monitoring and related support systems to ensure the fidelity of program delivery, and to create a robust continuous quality improvement system that leverages data to make improvements in the home visiting system. Finally, the state’s policymakers must commit to a transparent and sustainable funding strategy that carefully considers the best available data, relies on a sound economic analysis, accesses all available funding streams, and leverages local collaborations and resources as critical building blocks of the needed infrastructure.