Federally-funded Home Visiting Programs in Illinois: Highlighting Innovative Projects

The Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) Program is the federal home visiting initiative and provides the main source of federal funding for home visiting in Illinois. In addition to using MIECHV funds to expand and improve direct services to families, Illinois has used MIECHV funds for a variety of innovative projects. MIECHV funding enables Illinois to create laboratories for researching and testing pilots and demonstration projects, as well as valuable trainings, tools and approaches that can be applied more broadly. Showing the beneficial impacts of these innovative projects on a smaller scale will build a case for expanding them to more programs across the state.

Each of the following innovative projects are funded, in part, with MIECHV funding. Together, these components will strengthen Illinois' MIECHV programs and will build capacity within the state's home visiting system.

Home Visiting for Homeless Families Demonstration (HVHF) Project:
Young children who experience homelessness face a host of challenges that threaten their health, development and ability to succeed in school. Unfortunately, many of the homeless services families may be accessing do not provide child-centered, comprehensive services that address child well-being and parent-child attachment. At the same time, these families also face barriers to accessing early childhood services and supports that can improve outcomes, such as evidence-based home visiting.

Through high-quality home visiting services, the HVHF Project seeks to improve the developmental trajectories (i.e., improvements in breast-feeding rates, developmental screenings, well-child visits and maternal efficacy rates) of children experiencing homelessness in Chicago. The HVHF Project's approach is to train homelessness providers on home visiting, hire a home visitor whose caseload is exclusively homeless families and provide training to a shelter on implementing the Parents as Teachers model. The six providers involved in the HVHF Project communicate with one another on a regular basis to coordinate referrals and provision of services. In addition to these community collaborations, there is a statewide advisory group that meets quarterly to discuss systems issues and new ideas. The HVHF Project will collect data that will indicate impact and inform future efforts. To date, learnings include the importance of using the educational definition of homelessness, and that there is significant interest from other parts of the country in doing a similar project.
Illinois Pregnant and Parenting Youth in Care Home Visiting (I-PPYC-HV) Pilot Project:
Nationally and in Illinois, young children ages birth to five comprise nearly half of all child maltreatment cases. Research shows that early exposure to abuse and neglect can have negative impacts on development and learning. Home visiting has been shown to be an effective intervention in preventing maltreatment. The I-PPYC-HV Project provides pregnant and/or parenting youth in child welfare care with access to voluntary home visiting services that are provided by eight programs located in Cook County, the Collar Counties and central Illinois. The I-PPYC-HV Project uses the Healthy Families America curriculum and includes infant/early childhood mental health consultation for the participating home visitors. The I-PPYC-HV Project will serve 30 young families over a two year period. An evaluation is being conducted by Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago that will include both an implementation and an outcome study.

The goals of the I-PPYC-HV Project are to promote nurturing parent-child relationships and healthy child development, enhance family functioning by reducing the risk of abuse and building protective factors, break the intergenerational cycle of abuse, neglect and trauma, increase coordination between the child welfare and home visiting systems in Illinois and create a model that can be replicated throughout Illinois.

Illinois Universal Newborn Support System (UNSS)
Based upon the principle that all families need some level or degree of support, MIECHV funds are being used to create a universal system in Illinois to reach all newborns and their parents offering them a home visit to provide information, supports and resources to strengthen the capacity of the parents to meet their children's needs. Based on an individual family's level of need and personal resources, assistance will range from providing information on how to care for newborns, to offering assistance with breast-feeding, to finding appropriate child care, to referring families to parent support groups, to making referrals to high-intensity services such as home visiting.

The pilot sites for UNSS are in Stephenson County and Peoria County. Each uses the Durham Connects curriculum and nurses will serve as the home visitors. Guiding principles of UNSS include:

- A universal strategy reduces the stigma associated with targeting interventions to predetermined high-risk populations
- Conducting the assessment in a parent's home increases the likelihood families in need of the most intensive support will be appropriately referred and will accept such assistance
- There is no singular programmatic solution to the challenge of supporting parents of young children, and every agency and system has a role to play in building the system
Expansion of Doula Services
Eight home visiting programs in underserved communities are testing the impact of incorporating a community doula model into their traditional home visiting services. This project helps parents build strong bonds with their babies before the child is born. Preliminary findings show an improvement in maternal and child health outcomes.

“Fussy Baby” Training
The Erikson Institute’s Fussy Baby Network (FBN) Enhancement Training provides support for families who have concerns about their baby’s crying, sleeping, feeding or temperament during the first years of life. The training uses a family-centered approach. Preliminary findings support that this training helps the home visitor be more attentive and attuned to the families they serve and improvements were shown in parental well-being outcomes. The FBN evaluation and scale-up aims to strengthen the capacity of multiple program models to improve child outcomes and will introduce innovations to the statewide system.

Developing a Uniform Quality Rating Tool
The Erikson Institute is partnering with over 20 home visiting programs to create a home visiting program quality rating tool, which will develop uniform indicators of quality across Illinois home visiting agencies and models. This research fills a much-needed gap in Illinois by offering a cross-model approach to quality and quality improvement for the State’s multiple-model system.

Randomized Control Trial (RCT) of Doula-Enhanced Home Visiting
This research undertaken by the University of Chicago with four well-established home visiting programs uses high-quality research methods to examine the effectiveness of doula-enhanced home visiting for improving maternal and child health, parenting and child development. The RCT will contribute further to the research base for the doula model, which is being implemented in multiple states as an enhancement to evidence-based home visiting models. Preliminary results of the RCT are promising.

More about the MIECHV Program
The MIECHV Program was established in 2010 and was designed to expand voluntary, evidence-based home visiting programs across the US and improve the outcomes for pregnant women and families, particularly those considered at-risk. The MIECHV funding provided to Illinois over the last six years has been a vital part of our home visiting and early childhood systems, and builds on three decades of state investment in home visiting to support voluntary, evidence-based home visiting models that partner with families from pregnancy through their children's first years of life.

The MIECHV program is scheduled to expire on September 30, 2017, unless the US Congress takes action and passes a law to reauthorize it. If you would like to advocate for the reauthorization of MIECHV, visit our website to learn what you can do to help.