



MICHIGAN HOME VISITING & COVID-19

LISTENING TO FAMILIES

In April 2020, listening sessions were convened with parent leaders to learn about how communities are responding in the COVID-19 crisis. In particular, parents were asked what they need from home visitors and what concrete supports they need in the emergency.

Parents described how they are interacting with home visitors and the role home visitors play in providing support. We learned about other ways they are getting help and concrete supports. In addition, we heard about communities coming together to help families with new babies and young children.



Food and supplies

Families are getting support from food pantries, schools, law enforcement and fire departments, and neighbors for pick up and delivery of food and other basics supplies for home. These supports particularly aid those who unable to leave home due to sickness, high risk status, or transportation barriers.



Virtual support

In addition to connecting with home visitors, parents are participating in Great Start Parent Coalition meetings, virtual play dates, and groups to connect and share resources.



Help with new babies

Circles of family, friends and neighbors are supporting families with new babies by doing telephone check ins, dropping off supplies, shopping for and dropping off groceries, and diapers and other supplies. Faith communities and other community-based organizations are also supporting families in these ways.



Other supports

- Community-based organizations providing access to WIFI, at convenient locations and/or from school buses.
- Schools dropping off learning packets.
- Holding car parades to celebrate birthdays and graduations.
- Faith communities keeping in touch via Zoom or telephone.
- People making masks for health personnel or neighbors.
- Neighborhood associations bringing flowers with a note to check in about needs.



What more is needed?

This is a challenging time for families with new babies and young children. Parent leaders shared that in many areas, families still do not have sufficient supplies of basics such as hand sanitizer, disinfectant cleaning supplies, and toilet paper. They report shortages of baby wipes, and baby and diaper pantries are really stretched due to the increased need for diapers and other supplies.

While there are a lot of supports for access to food, some families are struggling because they have been laid off and now have a need or may qualify for supports like SNAP or WIC but don't know how to sign up for these services. New moms are having trouble finding breastfeeding support and may be struggling.

Masks were also identified by several parents as a big need that is not consistently being met. Access to masks is limited and the ones that are available are expensive and not sustainable (paper masks). One parent shared that she heard from another parent that they were given a warning because they didn't have a mask when going to the local grocery store.



How can home visiting help?

Families that are still receiving home visiting services reported that home visitors are checking in through virtual platforms and phone calls. While often shorter than traditional face-to-face visits, families reported that virtual visits have been a great support. Parents shared that home visiting program supports include: providing activities and learning ideas for children, helping them connect to community resources, listening their concerns, and reminding them to also take care of themselves. In addition, parents said that home visitors are regularly checking to make sure that they have what they need and are dropping off needed supplies to families.

Parents said that some families they know are enrolled but unable to connect to home visiting services because they do not have phones or have talk time minutes. Another issue is that, while programs are still enrolling families they identify, there may be many more families who need the services but cannot connect to them.

Recommendations

Research shows that home visiting works to support vulnerable families in times of need and stress. The COVID-19 crisis has left more families in need of concrete and emotional supports. The response of Michigan's home visiting programs demonstrates their commitment to service families in these times of crisis.

- Maintain and grow federal, state, and private funding for Michigan's home visiting programs.
- During any public health crisis, pay for virtual visits at the same rate as in-person home visits.
- Permit some public funds to be used for costs related to virtual visits such as hardware, Internet access, and materials for families.
- When new resources are available, focus on families and communities at higher risk.



The Michigan Council for Maternal and Child Health (MCMCH) advocates for public policy that will improve maternal and child health and optimal development outcomes through prevention programs, access to care and adequate funding/reimbursement for providers. Since 1983 MCMCH has worked with administrators, legislators, policymakers, coalitions, communities and advocates to shape and influence policy affecting women, infants, children and families.

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