



The District's Dime

Going Beyond the Budget Book

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Family Health Home Visiting: A Cornerstone For Effective Early Childhood Policy

By Wes Rivers

Mayor Bowser and the DC Council will start next year with lots of great ideas to make DC stronger, but will face budget realities that force them to make choices. That means focusing on smart investments known to produce results. One of those smart ideas is DC's home visiting program for at-risk families with young children. Every dollar spent helping families has been shown to save almost \$6 down the road by leading to better education and health outcomes for children. Yet the city's program only serves one-quarter of the families in need and could be expanded to serve more.

Maternal and child health home visiting targets services to expecting parents and families with children under age five. Families are identified due to factors such as late or no prenatal care, preterm delivery, low parental education, or family history of substance abuse. The District uses models that been studied carefully and shown to be effective by focusing on maternal and child health, a child's physical and cognitive development, parenting practices, school readiness and access to community resources and immunizations.

These early investments in the lives of vulnerable families pay off. Every dollar invested in the program today could produce \$5.70 in savings related to health and academic outcomes down the road.

DC's program began a few years ago with federal grants provided by the Affordable Care Act. This year, the DC budget includes \$2.5 million in local funds to replace those federal funds as they expire and allow home visiting to continue.

However, this is enough to serve only a fraction of the families that could benefit. Home visiting in DC is limited primarily to families in Wards 5, 7, and 8, with capacity to help about 935 families per year. But 3,500 more children could benefit, according to estimates from the [Home Visiting Council](#).

To serve those families and to expand to all eight wards, the District will need to increase ongoing support for the program. An investment of \$10 million annually would ensure that the program reaches all at-risk families, some of which could be covered reimbursed with federal Medicaid funds.

Family Home Visiting Could Have Huge Cost Savings for DC



Source: Rand Corporation
http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/monographs/2005/RAND_MG341.pdf
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Family health home visiting shows a lot a promise – it is effective in improving health and academic outcomes for kids and it is a good deal for DC taxpayers. We hope our new mayor and the DC Council will support the expansion of DC’s Home Visiting Program in the fiscal year 2016 budget.