



The District's Dime

Going Beyond the Budget Book

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Home Visiting Programs Make Sense for DC

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Some District's Dime readers might remember a time when doctors and other medical professionals made house calls. The personal touch made patients comfortable and helped health providers get to know the people they were caring for. That old-fashioned model of health care delivery has seen a comeback recently, as a way to help vulnerable families with babies or young children. Nationwide, home visiting programs are increasingly seen as an essential part of a comprehensive strategy to improve early childhood development and health.

DC recently began to implement home visiting programs that provide an opportunity to reach thousands of households and children with unmet health needs. However, the city currently serves only one of seven families that could benefit. Moving forward, the city should work to expand high-quality home visiting to make sure it reaches as many young children as possible.

The need for early childhood interventions in the District is great. About 1,800 babies born each year — one fifth of all births in the city — are at high health and developmental risk due to factors such as late or no prenatal care, preterm delivery, low parental education, and family history of substance abuse. In addition, nearly one in three DC children live in poverty, meaning they likely face higher barriers to accessing health care.

Evidence-based home visiting services alleviate these risk factors by improving maternal and child health, parenting practices, and access to community resources. By definition, these programs are family-focused and use the home to deliver services directly to expecting parents and families with children under age five. They help ensure children enter school ready to learn, improve early mental and physical development, and increase use of needed health services and immunizations. High quality home visiting programs can also contribute to the prevention of child abuse and family violence.

The success of home visiting programs makes them cost effective, too. Research has found that every dollar invested in home visiting saves [\\$5.70 down the road](#) in costs related to health and academic outcomes.

Who is eligible for DC's home visiting services? Parents and other primary caregivers who are:

- Pregnant and/or have a child up to five years old
- At social, economic or health risk for themselves and their children
- In need of information about parenting and early childhood education
- Residents of the District of Columbia

There is a real need in the District to expand high quality home visiting programs. DC currently serves about 500 families, but an estimated 3,500 young children could potentially benefit from home visiting. The District has received some federal funds to expand home visiting to all eight wards, but a local funding strategy will be needed to maintain growth in services, because federal funding will run out in 2015.

A group of community and District agencies, the [DC Home Visiting Council](#), works to strengthen the city's implementation of home visitation strategies. The group, including DCFPI, will be working to ensure that all vulnerable families are getting access to the services they need and that there is a strategy to sustain home visiting after federal funds disappear.

You can learn more about DC home visiting at <http://www.dchomevisiting.org> or with this [brochure](#). Also, keep updated through DCFPI's advocacy efforts with the larger HV Council by signing up [here](#).