



Understanding the Needs of California's Home Visiting Workforce During COVID-19 | Executive Summary

This research was conducted in collaboration with Harder+Company with funding from First 5 California

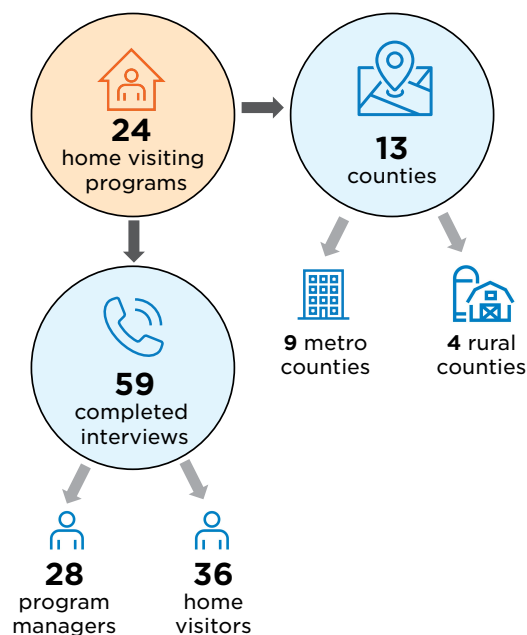
Introduction

In March 2020, home visiting services in California had to quickly shift from an in-person format to an almost entirely virtual setting to meet new public health requirements put in place as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. While some home visiting models had been exploring a virtual component to home visiting service delivery,¹ the pandemic required nearly all home visitors in California—and across the country²—to make this change at once. To help California learn the implications of its shift to virtual home visits, Child Trends and Harder+Company conducted a study that included interviews with 59 home visiting staff and surveys with 46 families during June and July 2020.³ This executive summary describes findings from this study, including the implementation supports needed for virtual service delivery, the COVID-related challenges and stressors impacting home visiting staff and the families they serve, and families' perspectives on virtual home visiting during the pandemic.

Results

Overall, the transition to virtual home visits has gone well in California. While families and home visitors know there are limitations to virtual visits, they find value in having a virtual option and appreciate being able to stay connected. This is particularly important during the COVID-19 pandemic as families experience increased worry and a higher demand for basic goods such as food and diapers. In addition, home visiting staff reported that having a virtual option continue into the future will allow greater flexibility in meeting with families who experience a variety of challenging circumstances—including unsafe living conditions or multigenerational homes—and can give families more control over scheduling visits.

Figure 1. Interview Participants



¹ Parents as Teachers National Center. (March 18, 2020). National Nonprofit Organization Turns to Telehealth to Help Mitigate Coronavirus Outbreak. Retrieved from <https://parentsasteachers.org/news/2020/3/18/national-nonprofit-organization-turns-to-telehealth-to-help-mitigate-coronavirus-outbreak> in September 2020.

² O'Neill, K., Korfmacher, J., Zagaja, C., and Duggan, A. for the Home Visiting Applied Research Collaborative. (April 10, 2020). *COVID19's Early Impact on Home Visiting*. First report from a national HARC-Beat survey of local home visiting programs. <https://www.hvresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/COVID-19s-Early-Impact-on-Home-Visiting.pdf>

³ Participating home visiting programs represented both evidence-based and home-grown models, as well as different geographic regions of the state, including rural and urban.

Key Findings



Home visitors and families primarily communicate using phone calls and texts.

- All home visitors reported maintaining contact with their families through, at least, texting or phone calls. Similarly, all families reported maintaining some form of communication with their home visitor; most reported that they like being able to stay in touch with their home visitor during the pandemic.
- Home visitors and families reported that the ability to stay engaged and in contact has been a success of virtual home visiting.



While virtual home visits are going well overall, some key challenges stand out.

- Home visitors also reported some challenges, including concerns about their level of stress and issues related to work-life balance. The latter include the need to juggle multiple responsibilities while working from home. In addition, some staff still need cellular data, Wi-Fi, technical devices, and office supplies.
- Another key challenge for home visitors is the inability to physically see families' home environment during virtual visits.
- Families reported challenges with technology, including access to phone or internet data, Wi-Fi, or other devices.



Home visitors are meeting families' changing needs.

- Families' needs have changed as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. To meet those needs, home visitors reported helping families with things like applying for assistance and accessing necessities (e.g., food, diapers); families reported that home visitors have helped reduce their stress or worries and access services and supplies.



All home visitors believe that virtual visits should continue in the future.

- Home visitors believe that virtual visits should continue after the pandemic has eased for some families, or for some types of home visiting activities; many families also reported that they want to continue some virtual visits.
- While families and home visitors feel excited about seeing each other in person again someday, both groups are also concerned for their health and safety should in-home visits resume soon.
- Preliminary considerations for supporting virtual home visits both during the pandemic and long-term include the following:
 - Addressing challenges with enrolling and engaging new clients 100 percent virtually
 - Developing additional supports for the types of visits that are less well-suited or not yet adapted for virtual visits
 - Ensuring that home visitors have all technological resources needed for virtual visits



A variety of supports were made available to home visitors as they transitioned to virtual visits.

- Almost all home visitors received some type of training to provide virtual home visits and felt well-supported in terms of their access to technology to conduct those visits.
- In addition to training, almost all home visitors received ongoing guidance from their supervisors and support with technology.

Through the flexibility demonstrated by home visiting program leadership—and with guidance from the state (e.g., the state's partnership with the national Rapid Response Virtual Home Visiting project), home visiting models, and supervisors—home visitors have been able to transition to virtual home visiting while still feeling supported and able to meet the changing needs of their families, as described in the following key findings. A full research brief on these findings can be found [here](https://www.childtrends.org/publications/understanding-needs-californias-home-visiting-workforce-during-covid-19) (<https://www.childtrends.org/publications/understanding-needs-californias-home-visiting-workforce-during-covid-19>).

Limitations

Data collected for this COVID study represent one point in time and were drawn from a small sample. While these findings are limited, they provide insights into the flexibility of home visitors and home visiting services during a time of crisis like the COVID-19 pandemic. While emerging findings from this study about the feasibility of virtual home visiting and the experiences of staff and families in California are similar to findings from other states,⁴ future research should explore whether the needs of the home visiting workforce or families have shifted in the months since the pandemic began.

Acknowledgements

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⁴ Marshall, J., Kihlström, L., Buro, A., et al. (2020). Statewide Implementation of Virtual Perinatal Home Visiting During COVID-19. *Maternal and Child Health Journal*. 24, 1224-1230. <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10995-020-02982-8>