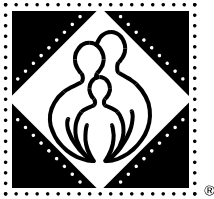


# Why a State System for Home Visitation is Critical: A Research Rationale



In 1992, Prevent Child Abuse America launched the Healthy Families America program, a national voluntary home visiting initiative whose goals are to promote positive parenting, enhance child health and development and prevent child abuse and neglect. Healthy Families America sites are administered through a variety of organizational structures. As the number of sites has increased, so has the need to develop local and statewide infrastructures to support this growth.

**State systems** are statewide networks made up of representatives from multiple fields working together to support families through voluntary home visiting services, have emerged as an efficient administrative model. State systems have allowed for broad advocacy efforts, integrated technical assistance and the pooling of resources that have been building the capacity of the Healthy Families America network since 1998.

## Research Tells Us Why State Systems for Home Visitation Work

Research studies undertaken by academia, foundations and nonprofit organizations have been critical in helping the field better understand the challenges and best practices in home visitation. Below is a brief summary of research findings that support the development of state systems for home visitation.

### **Lisbeth Schorr, author of *Common Purpose* and Lecturer at Harvard University:**

⊙ Through her analysis of various case studies of social service programs, Schorr identified several “elements of successful replications” including: the backing of a larger organization offering expertise and support to individual program sites; understanding the influence of the political and social environment while growing a program; strategically planning growth and direction; and evaluating successes.

### **Charles Bruner, Executive Director, Child and Family Policy Center:**

⊙ Bruner states that an effective social service system must possess the following characteristics: community-based (providing shared decision-making and governance with localities); holistic (delivering a seamless approach to families); results-accountable (systematically collecting outcomes data); and participatory (engaging a wide variety of constituents).

### **Hiro Yoshikawa, Professor of Psychology, New York University**

⊙ Yoshikawa, et al, warn that the growth of a program is not simply the addition of more sites, but rather a more complex and interactive system that provides support in a variety of areas, including training, quality assurance and evaluation. Higher levels of organization, rather than direct program-to-program interaction, are necessary to support and grow the service.

**The Healthy Families America State Systems model provides the essential elements of success that have been identified by these researchers.**

## **State Systems Produce Positive Outcomes for Children and Families**

In evaluating a “systems level approach” to coordinating health care services, researchers in North Carolina concluded that “system-level interactions hold promise to improve the effectiveness and outcomes of care for children.” Their findings, published in the journal *Pediatrics*, demonstrated outcomes that included policy-level changes, the alignment of multiple organizations toward a common goal, reduced duplication of services, and better health outcomes for mothers and children compared to the outcomes of previous randomized trials.

## **Conclusion**

Research has provided an important justification for the state systems support work of the Healthy Families America program. With the solid backing of research, the Healthy Families America approach is further validated and paves the road for further advocacy and funding pursuits.