

# Introduction

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## ***How to Use this Guide***

This guide has been developed to provide a clearinghouse of information and innovation from the Healthy Families America leadership at the state level and Prevent Child Abuse America (PCA America) national staff in order to support and grow the program across the country. In its CD-Rom form, this guide connects the user through links and PDF files to a variety of tools and resources that have been created to aid state systems development. In addition, the guide contains a variety of case studies that illustrate the best practices in home visitation that are evolving across the country. We hope this guide is useful, as a virtual one-stop shop for the development of state systems for home visitation.

## ***Background***

In 1992, PCA America launched the Healthy Families America program, in partnership with Ronald McDonald House Charities, to support and educate new parents at the time of their baby's birth and in the months and years thereafter. Thanks to support from the Freddie Mac Foundation, the program has leveraged significant public and private funds to greatly expand the reach of this critical program.

Healthy Families America has grown into a national voluntary home visiting initiative with three goals:

- To promote positive parenting,
- To encourage child health and development, and
- To prevent child abuse and neglect.

The program model is defined by solid, evidence-based criteria called the critical elements ([http://www.healthyfamiliesamerica.org/about\\_us/critical\\_elements.shtml](http://www.healthyfamiliesamerica.org/about_us/critical_elements.shtml)).

Through the implementation of the critical elements, Healthy Families America programs offer home visiting and related supportive services to families in over 450 diverse communities in over 35 states, the District of Columbia and Canada.

In an ideal world, all communities would have the opportunity to access Healthy Families America and other home visiting services. However, funding inadequacies and capacity issues limit the field to a constrained growth of this program. As practitioners work to bring the program "to scale," the need for the organization and coordination of resources becomes critical, necessitating infrastructures to support this growth.

## ***What is a State System?***

Within the Healthy Families America community, the state infrastructure that supports home visiting programs is referred to as a "**state system.**" **A state system is "an infrastructure comprised of representatives from multiple disciplines who work collaboratively to support families through the provision of home visiting services."** A state system facilitates the integration of components such as training, evaluation and quality assurance to help ensure that members of the system keep abreast of emerging issues as they relate to serving families and children.

The concept of a state system for home visiting can be traced back to 1976 when the Hawaii Healthy Start program created the Statewide Council on Child Abuse and Neglect, an entity involved in “collaborative advocacy” on all five islands of the state.<sup>i</sup> After over a decade of enhancing their system, the Healthy Start Network emerged with impressive outcomes, inspiring the creation of the Healthy Families America program. By 1995, the three-year-old initiative already understood that each state should “take responsibility for the well-being of all their children...by creating a permanent infrastructure that can support all children.”<sup>iii</sup>

At that time, PCA America began devoting significant resources toward assisting states in the creation of planning teams or task forces that engaged state level administrators and policy makers in the growth of the program. By 1997, an official goal of Healthy Families America was “to establish national and state capacity to build upon and expand existing service networks and provide expertise to local communities,” leading to the formalization of the state systems function at the national level in 1998 (See the HFA Timeline at <http://www.healthyfamiliesamerica.org/ssdq/>).

### ***What are the benefits of State Systems for Healthy Families America?***

Research confirms that having a state system for home visitation enhances and supports the work carried out at the local level. Utilizing research literature, PCA America developed a rationale to establish a research base that validates the importance of state systems.

***Click here to view the Research Rationale for State Systems Development, a summary of arguments researchers are making that support the development of state systems for home visitation:***

<http://www.healthyfamiliesamerica.org/downloads/Rationale.pdf>

***Click here to view a one-page summary of the above Research Rationale:***

[http://www.healthyfamiliesamerica.org/downloads/hfa\\_research.pdf](http://www.healthyfamiliesamerica.org/downloads/hfa_research.pdf). This publication can be a useful advocacy tool for both building long-term public support for state systems, and defending the system in times of state fiscal crisis and administrative cuts.

Evidence and experience tell us the benefits of a state system are clear. Not only does a state system contribute to building the capacity of a state to deliver services to children and families but a system also provides for the sustainability of those services over time. ***(Go to <http://www.healthyfamiliesamerica.org/ssdq/> or Appendix B for a list of potential benefits of creating a statewide system of home visitation in your state)***

### ***What are the challenges of building a State System?***

The work of state systems is complex, requiring commitment and cooperation from many individuals, organizations and institutions. This guide will aid state leaders in addressing these challenges with information based on a decade of lessons learned. ***Go to <http://www.healthyfamiliesamerica.org/ssdq/> or Appendix B for a list of challenges of creating a state system for home visitation.***

## **Network Leadership**

### ***Who are State Leaders?***

At the core of the success of Healthy Families America is a cadre of seasoned and committed leaders in the field who implement the program at the state level -- State Leaders. A State Leader is someone who is committed to supporting the growth and development of home visiting programs statewide, and who:

- Actively participates in a statewide home visiting and/or family support collaborative;
- Regularly communicates with sites and other State Leaders in the state and/or occasionally with the national office;
- Fulfills their responsibilities as a State Leader with support from their agencies; and
- Serves as a resource in his/her area of expertise and provides a reasonable amount of technical assistance and support.

State Leaders hail from many areas of expertise including: quality assurance, public policy, evaluation, training and public relations.

### ***Who are Primary Contacts?***

Each state is encouraged to designate several State Leaders from multiple disciplines who will utilize their distinct skills to develop a comprehensive state system. One of these individuals is identified by the state to serve as the Primary Contact.

A Healthy Families America Primary Contact is someone who is:

- Supportive of the philosophy of a state system;
- Knowledgeable about the activities of the program in his/her state;
- Willing to serve as a communications point person and liaison between the national office, sites and State Leaders, which may include the occasional dissemination of information;
- Capable of determining how best to utilize members of the Healthy Families America network in her/his state;
- Enthusiastic about collaborating with other key players in the state; including engaging the state PCA America chapter.

In essence, the Primary Contact facilitates the sharing of information between PCA America and the states. Each state only has one Primary Contact.

***(To view the Primary Contact in your state, click here:***

***[http://www.healthyfamiliesamerica.org/state\\_system\\_locator/index.shtml](http://www.healthyfamiliesamerica.org/state_system_locator/index.shtml)*** ).

### ***What is the State Leader's Advisory Committee?***

Given the breadth of the State Leaders network, an advisory entity, the State Leaders Advisory Committee (SLAC) was created in 1998. SLAC's mission is to work in partnership with PCA America/Healthy Families America to strengthen and develop a national network of state systems and local programs and to ensure the growth and sustainability of a comprehensive array of services for children and families.

SLAC members are nominated by the field and are selected with consideration to their geographic representation, area of expertise, affiliation with a PCA America chapter and ability to represent both their own state and the broader Healthy Families America network. Through this representation, SLAC operates towards the following goals:

- Develop leaders of the Healthy Families America initiative at the national and state levels.
- Integrate Healthy Families America components.
- Provide a national arena for bright ideas and emerging strategies.
- Advance a Healthy Families America research agenda.
- Advance Healthy Families America through creative alliances and effective advocacy.

**Click here to view a list of current SLAC members:**

[http://www.healthyfamiliesamerica.org/network\\_resources/state\\_systems.shtml#slac](http://www.healthyfamiliesamerica.org/network_resources/state_systems.shtml#slac)

### ***Healthy Families America State Systems Framework***

Due to the variety in scope, political climate, available resources and needs of states, there is no set formula or timeframe by which a state system is created. While the make-up of state systems varies from state to state, some core components have evolved that contribute to the effectiveness of systems for home visitation. These components, defined by representatives of the field, were formalized in a document entitled the *HFA State Systems Framework* and form the foundation of this guide.

The components of a state system include:

- Administration/Governance
- Strategic Planning
- Training and Technical Assistance
- Community Planning/Site Development
- Continuous Quality Improvement/Credentialing
- Public Relations (PR) and Media
- Public Policy/Advocacy
- Collaboration
- Public Education (Awareness)/Outreach
- Communication

States have demonstrated incredible innovation in implementing these components and supporting Healthy Families America programs. These components should be viewed as suggested guideposts or dynamic best practices, not proscriptive requirements to which a state system must rigidly adhere. Rather, this guide offers our best learning about how the program has developed over the past decade.

### ***State Systems Self-Assessment Tool***

The self-assessment tool provides a way to operationalize the state systems framework and to measure the activity of a state against guidelines for state systems development. The tool has both assessment and educational value and is used to help State Leaders understand the strengths of their own state systems and the possibilities for their system's continued development. **Click here for the Self-Assessment Tool:**

[http://www.healthyfamiliesamerica.org/downloads/self\\_assessment.pdf](http://www.healthyfamiliesamerica.org/downloads/self_assessment.pdf)

The following chapters in this guide will take you through each component of a state system in detail, providing you with the vision, definitions, and guidance for each component, and illustrative examples to draw upon when developing and strengthening your state system. Each section was developed by PCA America staff with contributions from state leaders sharing knowledge in their area of expertise.