



Local Public Health Association
of Minnesota

Family Home Visiting Improves Family Outcomes, Saves Health Care and Public Program Dollars

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Increasing stable, statewide funding to maintain and expand family home visiting programs is a top priority of the Local Public Health Association. Home visiting programs are supported by federal, state and local dollars, but local tax levies currently make up the greatest contribution. With significant investments being made at the local level, you may be wondering what exactly is home visiting? What are the benefits? And why is more state funding needed?

What is Family Home Visiting?

Family home visiting is a voluntary, home-based service targeted to families facing a variety of risk factors, including but not limited to teen parents or a history of child abuse, alcohol abuse, drug abuse, mental health disorders or homelessness. Visits are led by public health nurses and other trained staff, who provide social, emotional, health and parenting support and link families to needed resources. Home visits begin prenatally, whenever possible, and may continue up to two years or longer, depending on a families' unique needs and goals.

Minnesota's local public health departments are a primary provider of targeted family home visiting for at-risk women and families. Throughout our state, they use a combination of evidence-based and evidence-informed models to meet the unique needs and circumstances of families. All state-funded programs are governed by the Local Public Health Act (MN State. 145A.17).

What Happens During a Home Visit?

During home visits, public health nurses assess the baby's health and development, as well as the mother's physical and mental health. They provide education on a wide range of topics, like child development, breastfeeding, and car seat safety; help eligible families enroll in Medical Assistance and Women, Infant and Children (WIC); and build rapport and a professional relationship with the primary caregiver that allows her to tell their own story. If a parent has struggled with trauma in their past or experienced adverse childhood events (ACEs), like abuse, neglect or having a household member incarcerated or with a history of mental illness, they are at higher risk of maltreating their own children.

Public health nurses build on the caregiver's strengths and use those strengths to build successful parenting skills and a consistent, responsive relationship with the child. The early relationship between an infant and their caregiver shapes the child's cognitive development, their ability to self-regulate emotions and their ability to form stable relationships throughout their lifetime. Public health nurses role model secure, stable, and sensitive relationships with the goal of that caregiver reciprocating that relationship with their child.

What Are the Benefits of Home Visiting?

Through consistent and planned home visits, parents and caregivers learn how to improve their family's health and provide better opportunities for their children. Research shows that family home visiting:

- Reduces child maltreatment and childhood injury;
- Reduces domestic violence;
- Improves preventative care, while decreasing overutilization of emergency rooms;
- Improves school readiness;
- Decreases dependency on welfare programs for the family;
- Decreases incidence of chemical dependency;
- Decreases incidence of mental health issues;
- Decreases parental incarceration; and
- Decreases juvenile delinquency.

Why is More Funding Needed?

Even with a strong local investment, current funding from Medical Assistance reimbursements and grants mean local public health agencies are only able to serve a small fraction of the families that would benefit from home visiting. Child maltreatment and out-of-home placement continues to plague local budgets, and DHS recently reported that the number of Minnesota children suspected of being abused or neglected significantly increased in 2016. This directly affects human services, but costs of trauma also affect other departments, including public health, law enforcement and probation.

Exposure to toxic stress in childhood is linked to alcohol and substance abuse, depression, anxiety, and smoking, in addition to other chronic health conditions. Schools also experience the burden with a growing number of children experiencing adverse childhood events (ACEs). ACEs are detrimental to a child's mental and physical health, leading to higher costs for school support staff and special education.

Families are central to the healthy physical, social and emotional development of infants and young children. Family home visiting effectively supports at-risk families, improves outcomes for children and their families, and reduces health care and public program costs. Increasing funding for family home visiting—including by increasing Medical Assistance rates for public health nurses—would provide counties needed funding to maintain and expand these critical programs to serve more families in need.

Want to Know More?

Talk to your county public health director or community health services administrator about shadowing a family home visit in your region! ■

Streamline Purchasing with Cooperatives

As counties look ahead and develop strategies for the rest of the year, it would be beneficial to consider the use of cooperative purchasing, an effective tool to help save time and money. In an uncertain economic climate where counties are pushed to do more with less, cooperatives can easily assist with purchasing needs.

Benefits of Cooperative Purchasing

Cooperative purchasing combines the collective buying power of multiple agencies in order to provide a contract that can be utilized by other public agencies. A cooperative contract can improve the overall effectiveness of the purchasing process by providing volume discounts, administrative savings and other benefits. Essentially, if a public agency (a city, a county, or a school district, for example) goes out to bid for a product or service, other public agencies can piggyback off of that contract by using a cooperative and receive the same product or service at the negotiated discounted price.

The use of a cooperative ultimately reduces the total acquisition cost through economies of a scale. For example, if you go to a car dealership to buy one car, the salesman will bend over backwards to make you feel like you got a great deal – but the numbers may reveal that the markdown won't save you as much as you originally thought. Now, return to the car dealership to buy a hundred cars, and the price for each vehicle will go way down. You are almost guaranteed a good deal. This is simply because you have purchasing power. The concept of cooperative purchasing aims to place this power in the hands of cities, counties, school districts, nonprofits, and more – especially smaller agencies, to give them a greater advantage.

Cooperative purchasing can also increase a county's administrative efficiencies by eliminating the need to go through a bid or RFP process. It's no secret that the public sector continues to deal with budget and staffing issues – counties especially can find themselves dealing with funding concerns. A cooperative contract is designed to help counties receive competitively solicited pricing for goods and services as well as save staff time and resources. It is an impactful, user-friendly way to achieve savings.

About U.S. Communities

The largest national cooperative, U.S. Communities, is the only purchasing cooperative founded by public agencies, for public agencies. Since its founding twenty years ago, U.S. Communities has generated millions of dollars in savings for users.

Today more than 55,000 registered counties, cities, education institutions and nonprofits utilize U.S. Communities contracts to procure more than 2 billion dollars in products and services annually. There are no fees to participate and no purchasing minimums, allowing maximum flexibility for participating agencies.

"Everything you love about Amazon for the public sector."

U.S. Communities recently launched a contract that gives users access to a variety of quality products available on the Amazon Business online marketplace. With this new launch, purchasing teams can use Amazon Business to buy business items within the ten awarded categories: Office Supplies; Animal Supplies, Equipment and Food; Audio Visual and Electronics; Books; Home and Kitchen; Clothing; Musical Instruments; Higher Education Scientific Equipment and Lab Supplies; Classroom, School, Art Supplies and Materials; and Hard to Find Items (including 3D printers, commercial espresso machines, and more).

The contract has many additional exciting features. Through the U.S. Communities program, Amazon Business will provide public agencies with an avenue to not only concentrate miscellaneous spending, but to consolidate purchasing data and produce reports on it. Essentially, in addition to the products available on the marketplace, Amazon Business will offer unique tools to help purchasers, including multi-user accounts, approval workflows (customize order approvals, set spending limits, etc.), payment methods, reporting and analytics (track and monitor spending with dynamic charts and data tables), spend controls, and tax-exempt purchasing. Amazon Business strives to support local business development by continuing to expand their sourcing from local businesses.

The award of this contract represents U.S. Communities' commitment to providing relevant and suitable solutions for counties, solidifying the partnership's tagline, "everything you love about Amazon for the public sector."

The Bottom Line

Each month, more than 600 new participants register their organization with U.S. Communities in the interest of simplifying their procurement process. This continuing growth is fueled by the program's proven track record of delivering excellence in procurement solutions. As you assess the programs available to your city, be sure to include U.S. Communities on your list. ■

For more information on U.S. Communities, please visit www.uscommunities.org.