



# California Home Visiting Program: The Housing Challenge

## BACKGROUND

The Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act of 2010 was signed on March 23, 2010. This act established the **Maternal, Infant and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) Program**, which provides funds for evidence-based home visiting to families in at-risk communities.

The California Department of Public Health, Maternal, Child and Adolescent Health Division was designated as the single state entity authorized to apply for and administer program funds on behalf of California.

## CHVP GOALS

- ◆ Improve maternal and newborn health related issues
- ◆ Improve school readiness and achievement
- ◆ Improve family economic self-sufficiency for at-risk families
- ◆ Reduce child injuries, child abuse, neglect or maltreatment, and reduction of emergency department visits
- ◆ Reduce domestic violence
- ◆ Improve coordination and referrals for other community resources and supports
- ◆ Facilitate development of comprehensive early childhood systems

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**S**afe, affordable, stable housing is essential for the healthy growth and development of children. Children experiencing homelessness are four times more likely to show delayed development, have three times the rate of emotional and behavioral problems, have twice the rate of learning disabilities and are sick four times as often as other children.



Despite the importance of housing stability to children's development and health, families are the fastest-growing segment of the homeless population and now make up one-third of California's homeless population.<sup>1</sup>

## BARRIERS TO FINDING A HOME

Of the 22 California Home Visiting Program (CHVP) sites, 73% identify housing as one of the top three local gaps in services for their home visiting clients. Sites report that barriers for families experiencing unstable housing include:

- ◆ Inadequate resources available in their communities
- ◆ Long wait lists for publicly-funded housing and Housing Choice Vouchers (Section 8)
- ◆ High cost of housing
- ◆ Lack of employment opportunities to afford safe, stable housing
- ◆ Substandard housing conditions, with families refusing to report conditions, fearing eviction
- ◆ Policies that exclude persons under age 18 from signing leases or living unaccompanied in shelters, creating barriers for pregnant or parenting youth

## DID YOU KNOW?

- ◆ Estimates show that over 122,000 California children under the age of 6 are homeless<sup>2</sup>
- ◆ Emergency shelter for families with children is often more expensive than permanent supportive housing
- ◆ Federal support for low-income housing fell 49% from 1980 to 2003<sup>3</sup>
- ◆ Public housing and the Housing Choice Voucher program are the primary referral resources used when directing low-income clients to stable housing
- ◆ The average wait for public housing is 20 months<sup>3</sup>
- ◆ The average wait for Housing Choice Vouchers is almost 3 years<sup>3</sup>

**73%** of CHVP sites  
report housing as one of the  
top three service gaps  
for their home visiting clients

*"Homelessness is not caused merely by a lack of shelter, but rather by a variety of underlying, unmet needs, including physical, economic and social."*

—U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development



Maternal, Child and Adolescent  
Health Division,  
California Home Visiting Program

## TAPPING LOCAL RESOURCES

Living in unstable housing situations can limit the number and types of support services provided to pregnant and parenting families. Home visitors are especially challenged to keep track of “couch surfing” families in order to provide services.

Efforts to assist home visiting clients to find housing most often take the form of signing up families for public housing and Housing Choice Vouchers. Home visitors also refer clients to temporary and emergency local housing services.

## COMMON COMMUNITY HOUSING SERVICES

- ◆ **CHURCHES:** Rotating emergency shelters
- ◆ **NONPROFITS:** Temporary housing provided by non-profit and faith-based organizations
- ◆ **COMMUNITY AGENCIES:** Short-term vouchers for local motels

## TURNING TO THE STATE

*CA Department of Community Services & Development (CSD)*

The CSD funds locally-targeted initiatives and projects that address community needs, including housing needs. For example, CSD awarded funds in 2013 to the Sacramento Employment and Training Agency to provide case management, child care and subsidized work experience opportunities for pregnant and parenting youth currently or recently homeless. Learn more at <http://www.csd.ca.gov/>

# Housing as Part of a Comprehensive Spectrum of Services

**H**ousing support is a vital part of a comprehensive spectrum of services for pregnant and parenting families. CHVP’s home visiting sites estimate that roughly one-quarter of their clients need safe, stable housing. Many clients “couch surf” or live in motels, multifamily apartments, storage facilities, tents in wooded areas or cars. For at-risk parents attempting to stabilize their families, accessing resources to meet housing needs can be extremely challenging.

MIECHV funding through CHVP provides the opportunity to integrate home visiting programs into early childhood development systems at the state and local levels. An integrated system includes supports around emergency, temporary and permanent housing for families with children prenatal to 5.

## HOUSING COALITIONS

*Local Continuums of Care*

Continuums of Care (CoC) are HUD-funded community-based coalitions that organize to address homelessness and housing issues. CoCs exist in most California counties.

Home visiting programs can integrate themselves into local systems by networking with other groups interested in providing services to at-risk families, such as those represented in a CoC. Staff can attend local CoC meetings and invite CoC representatives to sit on their Community Advisory Boards.

## SPOTLIGHT ON INTEGRATION

*Child Development and Housing Collaboration in Antelope Valley*

Local collaborations that serve children 0-5 and their families can yield positive outcomes. In Antelope Valley, California, five service partners with expertise in domestic violence, mental health services and early childhood development collaborated to form a program for at-risk and homeless young mothers. One of the goals of this five-year, multi-site initiative was to increase collaboration between the child development and housing/homelessness service sectors. The demonstration project showed that 75% of children who received services demonstrated improved developmental screening scores.

## WORKING TOWARD A SOLUTION

*State, County and Local Recommendations*

Many agencies and groups recognize the need for safe, stable housing for families of young children. Recommendations from the U.S. Administration for Children and Families, National Network for Youth, California Homeless Youth Project and Housing California include:



- ◆ **Prioritizing homeless children** in the provision of services
- ◆ **Increasing appropriate access for young families** in shelters, transitional housing and permanent supportive housing
- ◆ **Improving coordination of services** with housing resources to help pregnant and parenting youth succeed in maintaining stable housing

## References

- <sup>1</sup> “Focusing on Solutions: Family Homelessness.” A Housing California Fact Sheet. [www.housingca.org](http://www.housingca.org)
- <sup>2</sup> An estimated 292,624 California children (0-17) are homeless; 122,000 is an estimate based on research that suggests 42% of all homeless children are aged 0-5. See “America’s Youngest Outcasts: State Report Card on Child Homelessness. California.” The National Center on Family Homelessness. [www.familyhomelessness.org](http://www.familyhomelessness.org)
- <sup>3</sup> “The Characteristics and Needs of Families Experiencing Homelessness.” The National Center on Family Homelessness. [www.familyhomelessness.org](http://www.familyhomelessness.org)

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