

Home Visiting and Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health

Extending the Reach of Home Visiting

Series on Home Visiting's Connections to Larger Systems of Support

SEPTEMBER 2026

Infants and toddlers develop a sense of self, connection to others, and safety through their early experiences. Nurturing relationships with consistent, caring adults are fundamental to promoting their emotional health and well-being. When this is missing, when young children grow up in more challenging environments, when their basic needs are not met, and their early emotional cues are misunderstood, they can be much more susceptible to long-term challenges including but not limited to poor health and difficulty with school.

Between 10% to 16% of young children experience social, emotional, or behavioral health challenges that negatively impact their development. The percentage is even higher (22%) for babies living in poverty.¹ Fortunately, the infant mental health field has a long history of building a continuum of evidence-based support from promotion, to prevention, assessment, and treatment. Infant and early childhood mental health professionals are skilled at offering therapeutic interventions and consultation to others working with young children – pediatricians, child care providers, home visitors, social workers, and more – as well as systems leaders.

Partnership between the sister fields of home visiting and infant and early childhood mental health can mean the world of difference for children and families. Infant and early childhood mental health providers are able to strengthen home visiting through consultation, reflective supervision, training, and direct support to families, and home visitors are able to more confidently identify concerns and connect families to a higher level of care when needed.

Promising Examples

The National Home Visiting Network set out to uncover examples of collaboration between the fields. The following examples illustrate what is possible when home visiting and infant and early childhood mental health work together.

¹ <https://www.zerotothree.org/issue-areas/infant-and-early-childhood-mental-health/>

Southcentral Foundation

Several Tribal Home Visiting grant recipients – including but not limited to Southcentral Foundation – work hand-in-hand with mental health colleagues to meet the behavioral health needs of the families enrolled in the home visiting program. Southcentral Foundation has behavioral health consultants funded by primary care who work alongside the Nurse-Family Partnership home visitors to support families in need of services. Sometimes the consultants join the visit to build relationships with families and then will offer 1:1 support in the home or refer the family to the mental health department for an even higher level of care. In addition, the behavioral health consultants review family assessments and meet with the home visiting team for case consultations once a month.

Essential Lesson:

This is an example of mental health consultation integrated into home visiting.

Michigan Model of Infant Mental Health Home Visiting Program

The Michigan Model of Infant Mental Health Home Visiting (IMH-HV)^{2 3} is a preventive intervention and treatment program that has been implemented through the public mental health system in Michigan for more than 50 years. It is grounded in the principles of parent-child psychotherapy and designed to support the parent-child relationship. The intervention can begin during pregnancy and continues until a child turns three years of age. Families who are identified at risk for parent-child attachment challenges, child safety, and/or behavioral health concerns are welcomed into the program which delivers weekly visits (or more frequent as needed, each lasting 90 to 120 minutes) in a family's home. Home visitors have a Master's degree in social work, psychology or related fields, have taken classes in psychotherapy, trauma informed care, and culturally responsive practices. They use evidence-based assessments and videotaping to guide their practice, and are supported through regular reflective supervision. IMH-HV providers are expected to have or be in the process of obtaining an endorsement as an Infant Mental Health Specialist.

Essential Lesson:

This is an example of an integrated model where home visiting itself is the mental health intervention.

Hawaii Association of Infant Mental Health

The Hawaii Association of Infant Mental Health (HI-IMH) is the state office for Parents as Teachers (PAT).⁴ HI-IMH works to support PAT affiliates to implement the model with fidelity, provides infant and early childhood mental health consultation, strengthens state-level partnerships, and supports alignment across the early childhood system.

Essential Lesson:

This is an example of a state/system-level infrastructural alignment between home visiting and mental health.

² <https://www.cebc4cw.org/program/the-michigan-model-of-infant-mental-health-home-visiting>

³ <https://michiganimhhv.org/>

⁴ <https://aimhhi.org/parentsasteachershawaii>

Collaboration Tips: Home Visiting and Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health

Home visiting programs can partner with infant and early childhood mental health by:

- Building relationships between home visiting and mental health professionals before a crisis occurs so that consultation and referral pathways are already in place when families need them.
- Embedding infant and early childhood mental health consultants in home visiting programs to provide reflective supervision, training, and support to home visitors, and 1:1 consultation with families as needed.
- Referring families to the mental health system who may need additional evaluations and interventions.
- Using data to identify and address the mental health needs of families and determine what level of support is appropriate.
- Strengthening promotion and prevention practices so that families receive support early.
- Connecting families to higher levels of support as needed.

Helpful Resources

Embedding Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation in Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting Programs - <https://mchb.hrsa.gov/sites/default/files/mchb/programs-impact/iecmhc-roadmap.pdf>

Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation in Home Visiting - <https://nhvrc.org/wp-content/uploads/NHVRC-Brief-060823.pdf>

Maternal Mental Health in Home Visiting - Addressing Depression, Anxiety, and Stress - <https://nhvrc.org/brief/maternal-mental-health/>

Zero to Three - Advancing Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health - <https://www.zerotothree.org/issue-areas/infant-and-early-childhood-mental-health/>

Infant-Early Childhood Mental Health in Home Visiting Programs Serving Diverse Families: Promising Strategies to Support Child and Family Well-Being - <https://www.nccp.org/publication/iecmh-hv-report/>

Zero to Three – Early Relational Health and IECMH: What do they mean? <https://www.zerotothree.org/resource/early-relational-health-and-iecmh-what-do-they-mean/>