

Chapin Hall & Start Early

Home Visiting in the Family First Context

Exploring Opportunities to Strengthen Collaboration between Home Visiting & Child Welfare through Family First

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Introduction and Overview

The Family First Prevention Services Act of 2018 (Family First) is landmark federal legislation that reorients child welfare towards prevention and seeks to reduce the use of foster care. It creates new opportunities for jurisdictions to expand evidence-based and innovative prevention services to keep families together, including home visiting programs. Supports and services for families with young children are particularly important—young children consistently comprise the largest percentage of children who enter foster care. Almost 45% of children entering foster care every year are under the age of 6, and approximately 20% are under the age of 1.¹ And, between 2011 and 2018, infants accounted for more than 70% of the total increase in foster care entries². While reasons for this increase are not entirely known, it is clear that new solutions are needed to prevent the entry of young children into the child welfare system.

Family First presents a new opportunity to build out a theory of change regarding how family strengthening programs like home visiting can meet the prevention aims of child welfare, to expand the reach of home visiting programs to more families,³ and to further transform the purpose and functions of state child welfare systems.

¹ <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/report/afcars-report-28>

² [Foster Care Entry Rates Grew Faster for Infants than for Children of Other Ages, 2011-2018 | ASPE \(hhs.gov\)](https://www.aspe.hhs.gov/reports-and-publications/foster-care-entry-rates-grew-faster-for-infants-than-for-children-of-other-ages-2011-2018)

³ In 2018, home visiting programs in the U.S. served less than 2% of families that could have benefited from these services, and only 3% of high priority families (including those whose income falls below the federal poverty line). This suggests a significant opportunity for home visiting programs to serve and support more families across the U.S.

Meisch, A., & Isaacs, J. (2019, December). *National Home Visiting Resource Center data in action brief: Exploring home visiting's unmet need: Comparing who could benefit to who is served*. James Bell Associates and the Urban Institute.

https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/101473/exploring_home_visiting_unmet_need_0.pdf

Home visiting programs are voluntary services that support families with young children. They aim to strengthen caregiver-child relationships and connect families to community resources and services through cross-system collaboration.

The primary purpose of home visiting services is to ensure that families with young children have the supports and resources they need to thrive. These voluntary services typically support families from the prenatal period through age 3. They aim to promote positive attachment and social-emotional development to strengthen caregiver-child relationships; promote maternal, infant, and early childhood physical, mental, and emotional health and safety, with an eye toward reducing disparities in health outcomes; provide developmental screening, monitoring, and referrals; and link families to community resources and services through cross-system collaboration, among other vital functions.

Home visiting can be particularly beneficial as a prevention strategy to reduce child welfare's involvement in the lives of families. Home visiting programs often take an intensive approach, building trusting relationships with families through frequent visits and repeated experiences over time. It is through this trusting relationship that home visitors and families partner together to identify the goals, resources, and supports that are meaningful to families.

Many states are centering their Family First prevention approach around voluntary home visiting, and some are creating community pathways for families to access home visiting services early, before child welfare involvement is necessary. Through this approach, states hope to achieve more equitable outcomes and realize the **prevention intent** of the Family First Prevention Services Act. As a result, more families will have increased access to home visiting programs, and additional capacity, workforce, and infrastructure will be needed.

This brief is an outgrowth of the April 2022 National Home Visiting Summit hosted by Start Early. It shares key takeaways from a plenary session and follow-up workshop focused on the intersection of home visiting and child welfare. It is designed for those interested in home visiting and child welfare policy, systems, and practices. This brief also explores key opportunities, challenges, and considerations that have been identified as Family First is implemented across the country, and provides recommendations to strengthen collaboration between child welfare and home visiting at the federal, state, and local levels.

The promise of the Family First Prevention Services Act lies in prevention. Since we know the power of home visiting in preventing child welfare involvement, bringing it to scale could be critical in fulfilling Family First's goal. Table 1 provides an overview of states and jurisdictions that are already providing, or intending to provide, home visiting services through Family First (as indicated in their Family First Prevention Plans, which must be approved by the federal government). As of April 2023, 28 jurisdictions include the Parents as Teachers model in their Family First Prevention Plan, 22 include the Healthy Families America model, and 15 include the Nurse-Family Partnership model.

In many ways, the demand for home visiting represented in Table 1 provides a view into the future of strengthening families and keeping young children safe. Home visiting can be the relationship-based family engagement service offered to promote family well-being, potentially reducing the need for investigative and child protective intervention. Additionally, even when a child protection intervention is necessary, families involved in child welfare can and do benefit from voluntary home visiting services. This suggests a need for **scaling up home visiting capacity and, in doing so, descaling child welfare capacity over time as child protection becomes less necessary and perhaps largely obsolete.**

Table 1. Home Visiting Models Included in Approved Family First Prevention Plans (as of April 2023)

Evidence-based Home Visiting Models	Family First Clearinghouse Rating	Number of States and Jurisdictions with Model in Family First Prevention Plan	States and Jurisdictions with Model in Family First Prevention Plan (★ indicates approval)
Child First	Supported	0	N/A
Family Check Up for Children	Well-Supported	3	California ★ New York ★ North Dakota ★
Family Spirit	Promising	2	Michigan ★ Oregon ★
Healthy Families America	Well-Supported	23	Arizona California ★ Colorado ★ Connecticut ★ Florida ★ Georgia ★ Hawai'i ★ Illinois ★ Indiana ★ Kansas ★ Maryland ★ Michigan ★ Montana ★ New Hampshire ★ New York ★ North Dakota ★ Ohio ★ Oregon ★ Pennsylvania South Carolina ★ West Virginia ★ Wisconsin ★
Nurse Family Partnership	Well-Supported	15	Arizona California ★ Colorado ★ Connecticut ★ Florida ★ Maryland ★ Michigan ★ Montana ★ New York ★ North Dakota ★ Oregon ★ Pennsylvania South Carolina ★ Washington State ★ Wisconsin ★ Tennessee ★
Parents as Teachers	Well-Supported	28	Arizona California ★ Colorado ★ Connecticut ★ Florida ★ Georgia ★ Hawai'i ★ Illinois ★ Indiana ★ Kansas ★ Maine ★ Michigan ★ Minnesota ★ Montana ★ Nebraska ★ New York ★ North Carolina ★ North Dakota ★ Ohio ★ Oregon ★ Pennsylvania South Carolina ★ Utah ★ Washington, DC ★ Washington State ★ West Virginia ★ Wisconsin ★ Tennessee ★
SafeCare	Supported	7	Arkansas ★ Colorado ★ Iowa ★ Michigan ★ Oklahoma ★ Utah ★ Washington State ★

The National Home Visiting Summit brings together system leaders, practitioners, advocates, and decision-makers in a collaborative pursuit to advance home visiting and systems of care to increase service quality and improve outcomes for children and families. The 2022 Summit provided opportunities through specific workshops and a plenary session for child welfare leaders and the home visiting community to exchange knowledge, build camaraderie, and engage in dialogue regarding emerging opportunities, challenges, and innovations with Family First.

The focus on Family First at the 2022 Summit reflects the interest across the country to further lean into systems partnerships between home visiting and child welfare agencies to create structural conditions that benefit families and provide access to supports without stigma or blame. The Summit also provided an opportunity to explore and address emerging concerns around the implementation of home visiting programs through child welfare.

The 2022 Summit opened with the plenary session “Home Visiting and Child Welfare: Emerging Family First Opportunities and Challenges.” During this session, Chapin Hall’s executive director, Bryan Samuels, facilitated a panel of child welfare leaders from New York State, Indiana, and Michigan. Panelists discussed strategies to deepen partnerships across home visiting and child welfare through Family First implementation, with the shared goal of strengthening families and preventing entry into the child welfare system. At a follow-up workshop, conference participants delved deeper into the considerations raised during the plenary session, largely from the perspective of the home visiting community.

Plenary Session: “Home Visiting & Child Welfare: Emerging Family First Opportunities and Challenges”

The plenary session, “Home Visiting & Child Welfare: Emerging Family First Opportunities and Challenges,” provided an opportunity for the home visiting community to learn how child welfare leaders from three states are including home visiting as a central evidence-based practice in their Family First Prevention Plans. With 750 participants, the plenary was the second-most attended session at the 2022 National Home Visiting Summit, demonstrating the tremendous demand for the content.



**Aysha E.
Schomburg, J.D.**

Associate Commissioner
Children’s Bureau

Associate Commissioner of the Children’s Bureau, Aysha E. Schomburg, J.D., opened the plenary session with a video message highlighting how Family First presents opportunities to expand access to family-strengthening evidence-based and innovative services. She emphasized that home visiting is an important component of Family First implementation and the goals of home visiting are aligned with those of the Children’s Bureau—to prevent child abuse and neglect and keep families together. Looking forward, collaboration between home visiting and child welfare will promote the development of a stable, well-trained, and diverse workforce that can provide culturally sensitive and adaptive services to children and families from a wide variety of backgrounds.



Bryan Samuels

Executive Director
Chapin Hall at the University of
Chicago

Chapin Hall Executive Director, Bryan Samuels, shared that Family First provides an unprecedented opportunity for child welfare to pivot towards prevention. A successful shift in practice and workforce will require child welfare systems across the country to contribute to the scale-up of home visiting programs and to develop partnerships that center family strengths and needs at all stages of planning, implementation, and evaluation.

Samuels then facilitated an exploratory panel discussion with **child welfare leaders from New York, Indiana, and Michigan**. Each of these jurisdictions has an approved Family First Prevention Plan that is centered on home visiting programs as the predominant prevention service.⁴ Indiana and New York intend for all children and families eligible for or receiving the Healthy Families America (HFA) program—whether through child welfare or in the community—to be able to access this prevention service through Family First.

Highlights from the State Child Welfare Leaders Panel



Lisa Gharthey Ogundimu, J.D.

Former Deputy Commissioner
Child Welfare & Community Services
New York State
Office of Children & Family Services



David Reed

Deputy Director
Child Welfare Services
Indiana Department of Child Services



Nancy Rostoni, MSW

State Administrative Manager
Prevention, Family Preservation &
Reunification Services
Michigan
Children's Services Administration

The three state child welfare leaders emphasized a steadfast need to **implement voluntary home visiting programs as designed** in alignment with model criteria and fidelity requirements, with the goal of proactively promoting strong parent-child relationships,⁵ addressing the impacts of trauma on relationships, and reducing the likelihood of child abuse and neglect and foster care entry. They shared their visions to redesign child welfare through Family First by building strong collaborative relationships between home visiting and child welfare, developing deep community partnerships, and expanding family access to evidence-based interventions and other resources. The leaders also expressed optimism that racial disparity and disproportionality in child welfare could be reduced as a result. Key highlights from the plenary include:

⁴ New York's Title IV-E Prevention Plan available at: <https://ocfs.ny.gov/main/sppd/docs/FFPSA-Prevention-Plan-2022Feb23.pdf>

Indiana's Title IV-E Prevention Plan available at: <https://www.in.gov/dcs/files/Indiana-Prevention-Plan.pdf>

Michigan's Title IV-E Prevention Plan available at: https://www.michigan.gov/-/media/Project/Websites/mdhhs/Folder50/Folder14/Michigan_IV-E_Prevention_Plan.pdf?rev=e58e527100474f5e949db0ff21108847

⁵ Throughout this brief, we use the term parent to describe all biological and nonbiological adults caring for a child.



Emphasizing Prevention in the Family First Prevention Services Act

- Partnering across child welfare and evidence-based home visiting programs, such as Healthy Families America (HFA), Parents as Teachers (PAT) and Nurse-Family Partnership (NFP), promotes the common goal of strengthening parent-child relationships and family well-being, thereby reducing the need for interventions such as child protective services and foster care.
- Implementing home visiting and child welfare partnerships to align with trauma-informed approaches can promote positive relationships and well-being, prevent child abuse and neglect, and reduce the likelihood of entry into foster care.



Promoting Collaboration and Providing Adequate Capacity

- Partnering between child welfare and home visiting will build a **prevention system that responds to the diverse needs of families** based on differences in geography, community, and culture.
- Investing in home visiting through Family First will require **collaboration across state agencies** to support family unity and integrity, prevent child abuse and neglect, and reduce likelihood of entry into foster care.
- Addressing the workforce crisis in both child welfare and home visiting can support **thoughtful capacity building in communities** to deliver home visiting and provide needed supports to families where and when they need and want them most.
- Collaborating with communities will ensure that our prevention system is informed by those delivering home visiting while lifting up the voices of families receiving services.



Partnering with Families

- Implementing home visiting in Family First as a **family-strengthening service through the community** may reduce the reticence families have or stigma they experience when directly involved with child welfare.
- **Prioritizing healthy parent-child attachment and addressing adversity** with home visiting is important during the early stages of development, when children are especially vulnerable, and is a key strategy for preventing entry into foster care.
- **Using home visiting programs' assessment process and family planning to meet** Family First requirements (such as an ongoing safety assessment and planning or a child-specific prevention plan) could increase family engagement and reduce duplication across systems.



Ensuring Home Visiting Model Fidelity

- Implementing home visiting services in alignment with model criteria and fidelity requirements is imperative to achieve the program outcomes of preventing child abuse and neglect found in the evaluation literature.
- Ensuring home visiting remains a **voluntary service for families in the community** through Family First distinguishes it from services where families directly experience an initial or on-going child welfare interface.

Key Takeaways from the Plenary Follow-up: “Family First & Home Visiting: Emerging Considerations in Early Implementation”

As a follow-up to the plenary, 250 practitioners, program directors, and policy professionals from the home visiting community were invited to engage in a peer-to-peer exploration of child welfare and home visiting innovations and partnerships emerging through Family First. Summit attendees engaged in small group discussions as thought leaders to share insights, reactions, and responses to guiding questions around three topic areas: (1) **opportunities** at the state and local level in the Family First context, (2) **challenges** that may emerge throughout planning, readiness, and implementation of Family First, and (3) **innovations** from strengthened child welfare and home visiting collaboration. Several themes emerged from the small group discussions described below.

Attendees provided key insights on emerging opportunities, challenges, and innovations with implementing Family First in the context of their own communities.

Opportunities

Guiding questions

- What existing opportunities do you see in the Family First context?
- What do you see as the future of child welfare and home visiting working together in the Family First context? Can you share examples of how this is being thought about?
- What important race equity and culturally relevant considerations need to be elevated in this context?

Engaging families by providing comprehensive support centered on their strengths and needs

- Clarifying to states, programs, families, and the general public that the priority of the Family First Prevention Services Act is to keep families together will be of critical importance.
 - Engaging families with more choice and self-agency and using a family-centered approach that builds on existing strengths and voluntary services can reduce the historic compliance-driven approach of child welfare.
 - Bringing families to the table as co-designers and thought leaders is key for true systems change to occur.
- Expanding home visiting will provide direct services to more families and connect them to available resources (including those that address health and socio-economic well-being) that provide holistic supports, prevent child abuse and neglect, and reduce entry into foster care. Studies are in process to assess and determine home visiting’s role in supporting family economic well-being, either as part of a home visiting program’s service delivery, or through resource and referral partnerships.⁶

⁶ See, for example, the federal HomeEc project: <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/project/supporting-family-economic-well-being-through-home-visiting-homeec>

Cultivating community-oriented and culturally responsive practices to reduce racial inequities

- Acknowledging the historically racist systems and structures upon which most social services were built is the first step on a long journey to establishing new approaches to service delivery.
- Ensure home visiting programs support the specific needs of families of color and other families who have been marginalized by structural and historical inequities should be prioritized.
- Employing staff from within the communities being served who have cultural and community knowledge will diversify the home visiting workforce pipeline, build community and family trust, and increase access to community-based resources.
- Creating systemic changes by moving towards the source and root causes of the problem, rather than focusing on the symptoms, will allow for better assessments of family needs, appropriate community-based referrals, and quicker access to trusted and meaningful services, which will keep families together.

Building a well-supported, community-based home visiting workforce

- Addressing and resolving the home visiting and child welfare workforce crisis by increasing compensation and closing the wage equity gap; creating equitable access to quality training, professional development, and career advancement; addressing staff wellness and well-being; and valuing caseworkers and home visitors in a way that acknowledges and reflects not only their daily challenges but also their contributions and importance will support recruitment efforts and encourage retention of staff for improved and expanded service delivery to families.
- Using Family First resources to build a high-quality home visiting workforce, rather than building more child welfare workforce capacity, could result in a greater return on investment in terms of reduced trauma and increased well-being.
- Creating and building upon existing partnerships between child welfare and home visiting can support the workforce of both sectors and potentially reduce burnout, decrease caseloads, and increase retention.
- Providing trauma-informed training that includes anti-racist and implicit bias topics can prepare the child welfare and home visiting workforce to understand their own biases and be culturally responsive to families of all backgrounds, leading to more reflective practice in their work.

Challenges

Guiding questions

- What emerging challenges do you see in the Family First context?
- How is apprehension around child welfare-home visiting collaboration being handled in your states?
- How do we address concerns about increased family surveillance and mandatory reporting in the child welfare-home visiting collaboration?

Establishing and maintaining authentic relationships with families through transparency and trustworthiness.

- Acknowledging and providing data that demonstrates the ways in which child welfare systems have surveilled and intervened coercively with families, particularly families of color, will be necessary to create an authentic home visiting and child welfare partnership built on family unity and integrity and strengthening principles.

- Maintaining transparency with families about home visitors' existing status as mandated reporters while also continuing the practice of focusing on positive parenting practices, child safety, parent-child attachment, and child development through a culturally humble lens will build trust with families.
- Creating clear role definitions and differentiations between home visitors and child welfare workers will help families and the professionals involved ensure continuity of service delivery, communication, and support.

Acknowledging and addressing inequities that harm children and families of color and lead to further disparities and disproportionate representation in the child welfare system.

- Addressing concerns regarding the overuse of child protective services in and disproportionate representation of families of color in the child welfare system will require home visitors and child welfare staff to understand history, context, policy, and service delivery.
- Encouraging strengths-based, culturally responsive, and trauma-informed approaches will serve as the basis for developing strategies that respond to the intersecting needs of families and will require new skills and capacities to be built.
- Partnering across home visiting and child welfare leadership to advocate for and create a macro-policy context that resources families to meet their basic needs and reduce inequities will be necessary.

Coordinating and integrating services, funding, and data across child welfare and home visiting systems.

- Scaling up home visiting services will be an outgrowth of Family First and will require coordinating service delivery, braiding financing, data sharing, and continuous quality improvement (CQI) across home visiting and child welfare at the federal, state, and local level.
- Coordinating appointments for families and administrative functions (for example, referrals and assessments) across child welfare and home visiting when both are involved will take time but can create more efficient access to services for families. Building trust between all (families, home visitors, and child welfare staff) will be needed before coordinated visits become realistic and effective.
- Making decisions about data sharing across systems will require careful consideration to ensure family privacy is protected and surveillance by child welfare does not occur.

Innovations

Guiding questions

- What opportunities do you see to increase the provision of economic and concrete supports to families as a core home visiting and child welfare service?
- How might strengthened child welfare-home visiting collaboration provide opportunities to redesign the front end of child welfare and the family user experience?

Prioritizing preventative approaches that are holistic and adaptable to meeting families where they are.

- Redesigning the front end of child welfare by offering home visiting services that focus on prevention, resist re-traumatization, and address family needs before a child welfare referral is made can improve how families experience supports.
- Addressing family needs more holistically by providing mental health and substance use supports, technology support for virtual services, and improved access to healthcare, housing, transportation, childcare services, and socio-economic supports is a key opportunity.

Building partnerships across child welfare and home visiting systems at the local level.

- Bringing child welfare and home visiting staff together on a regular basis for mutual learning about shared and differing experiences and responsibilities will foster strong relationship development and overall successful collaboration at the local level. Including families as leaders in learning opportunities would strengthen this process.
- Communicating transparently with families in the community about this collaboration, while clearly defining and distinguishing the roles and responsibilities of child welfare and home visiting, can address challenges with referrals and help families to access the right resources and services in a timely manner.

Expanding programs and funding to reach more families and use data-driven practices.

- Implementing Family First through home visiting can expand program capacity and service delivery so that fewer children are separated from their families and enter foster care.
- Partnering with service providers at the local level will help to address gaps, increase available services, and promote CQI efforts so programming can be adapted to family needs in real time.

Recommendations to Strengthen Home Visiting and Child Welfare Partnership through Family First Implementation

The 2022 National Home Visiting Summit elevated key recommendations to strengthen home visiting and child welfare partnerships through Family First implementation. These include but are not limited to:



01 Recommendation: Scale Up Home Visiting for Additional Capacity

Over half of all states have included one or more home visiting models in their Family First Prevention Plan, which represents a seismic shift in how child welfare will approach strengthening families and keeping young children safe. Since young children consistently comprise the largest percentage of children entering and in the foster care system, the potential to serve this population creates the need for more home visiting services. Yet, many jurisdictions have limited home visiting capacity. To the extent states and jurisdictions are undertaking broad system transformation, a significantly greater number of families will be referred by communities and child welfare to home visiting. This has significant infrastructure, resource, workforce, and practice implications across home visiting and child welfare.

States and jurisdictions must collectively assess existing capacity and project needs, create strategies for scaling up home visiting to meet those needs, and determine the policy and resource requirements for success. Child welfare funding for prevention services available through Family First provides important new federal resources. States will need to maximize and braid federal funds (including Medicaid, MIECHV, and Family First funding) to expand and sustain capacity for a broad range of prevention services, including home visiting. As home visiting scales up and families receive the services and supports they need, new opportunities for descaling child protective services capacity may emerge.

02 **Recommendation: Partner and Collaborate Across Child Welfare & Home Visiting for Collective Impact**

Partnerships across home visiting and child welfare at the federal, state, local, provider, and practitioner levels need to be created or deepened. To achieve the transformative promise of the Family First Prevention Services Act, families, home visiting, and child welfare need to collaborate to prevent child abuse and neglect and reduce likelihood of entry to foster care. Reaching this goal is best accomplished through intentional partnerships, strategic planning for collective impact, and joint clarity at all levels about the system change underway.

Federal partnerships are needed to provide leadership at the national level, including coordinated efforts across the Children’s Bureau and the Maternal and Child Health Bureau in the form of joint guidance and other resources. Additionally, joint policy advocacy will be needed to create the societal context in which families can thrive, home visiting can be most effective, and child welfare is deployed sparingly and only when necessary. This will require partnering across home visiting and child welfare leadership to advocate for and create a macro policy context that resources families to meet their basic needs and reduce inequities.

03 **Recommendation: Implement Home Visiting Services to Fidelity**

Home visiting programs being implemented through Family First have been extensively evaluated as voluntary programs for families with multiple stressors, and the literature describes the extent to which each is effective in preventing child abuse and neglect. The Family First legislation directed the development of a Clearinghouse to review evidence-based practices with outcomes including **prevention** of child abuse and neglect and improved child and adult well-being; home visiting programs are included in the Clearinghouse for this reason. Indeed, the purpose of Family First is to encourage implementing practices in ways that are consistent with the models. Thus, implementing home visiting services with fidelity to the model in the context of Family First will require redesigning the child welfare pathways and processes by which home visiting is made available to families to ensure these programs remain voluntary (for example, by eliminating the need for a hotline call to access services and ensuring that participation in home visiting is never framed as a mandatory component of child welfare involvement) and meet the needs of families (for example, through cultural adaptations of models and flexible service delivery).

“[Family First] is part of a much broader vision of strengthening families by preventing child maltreatment [and] unnecessary removal of children from their families. . . . It provides an opportunity for states to dramatically re-think how they serve children and families. It creates an impetus to focus attention on prevention and strengthening families as our primary goals, rather than foster care placement as our main intervention. The Children’s Bureau strongly encourages all states to take this opportunity to not only use [Family First] to fund these important services, but also to envision and advance a vastly improved way of serving children and families, one that focuses on strengthening their protective and nurturing capacities instead of separating them.”

[Children’s Bureau Program Instruction 18-09](#)

State Requirements for Electing Title IV-E

04

Recommendation: Orient Philosophies and Policies around Prevention

The historical origins and philosophical underpinnings of child welfare (to protect children) and home visiting (to strengthen families) are quite different. Even though many child welfare agencies are working diligently to orient around prevention, there is nevertheless an uneasiness about associating the two systems out of concern that families will be less safe and less inclined to engage in home visiting if child welfare is directly involved. Indeed, when the Affordable Care Act was passed, federal home visiting resources were initially to be administered by the federal Children’s Bureau before being moved to the Maternal and Child Health Bureau for this reason. While Family First brings child welfare and home visiting back together, the historical and policy artifacts remain and need to be brought into alignment. There is a need, therefore, to create a coordinated and enabling policy context across the child welfare and home visiting systems that more closely reflects the family strengthening approach through home visiting as a necessary supplement to child abuse and neglect prevention and foster care reduction. The two systems must understand each other’s philosophies and orient towards prevention in support of families.

05

Recommendation: Support a Diverse Community-based Workforce that Meets Families’ Needs

Ensuring that all families who are eligible for and choose to receive home visiting services are engaged in programs that are culturally responsive and meet their specific needs requires thoughtful capacity building. This may include training for child welfare and home visiting staff to ensure their work with families is culturally humble and responsive, and adaptable to the families and communities they serve. In Family First implementation, the home visiting and child welfare workforce will need to be informed about child welfare’s history of family separation and disproportionate intervention with communities of color. This training and knowledge sharing serves as a key race equity and social justice strategy; supporting the workforce of both sectors will be critical as they guide and offer resources to families.

Still, training alone will not resolve the existing workforce crisis or create a diverse, equitably supported workforce. Importantly, staff who are recruited from *within* communities hold cultural knowledge, accessible resources, and relationships that are key to keeping families engaged in services to completion and reducing the need for child welfare involvement. Workforce strategies should therefore prioritize recruitment and retention of staff who are representative of the communities being served. All workforce recruitment efforts will require robust compensation and other workforce supports as well as strategies for addressing benefits, burnout, job duties and requirements, secondary trauma, and staff well-being. The system needs to be robustly resourced to meet staff and program needs if the promise of prevention is to be realized. Structural racism and historical inequities of our nation’s economic policy and education system have created a race-based gap in accessing higher education opportunities. Until the upstream systems are reformed—including educational equity in our education systems from early childhood on and redefining of what constitutes a “professional”—this gap will remain. However, as the child welfare and home visiting systems reorient toward one another, these shared workforce challenges represent a call to action to collaborate and problem-solve around the workforce pathways necessary to recruit and sustain a highly qualified, well-supported, and representative field.

06

Recommendation: Center Family Engagement and Family Voice

Centering families and responding to their wants and needs creates a trusting environment that promotes protective and nurturing capacities. Engaging parents is fundamental in this process and a key aspect of home visiting. Child welfare strives to engage parents, and often succeeds, but there remains an originating policy framework that hampers this goal. The Children’s Bureau report [Parent Engagement: Reflections from the CFSR 2015 to 2017](#) indicated that “Reviewers also noted that in some cases caseworkers focused on

how to get parents to comply with a case plan rather than addressing the parents' issues or concerns." Family First has the potential to dramatically shift this dynamic if family engagement and strengthening are centered and home visiting becomes a key mechanism for doing so. This strategy also has implications for how Family First is implemented, particularly as it relates to crafting family-centered and strengths-based child-specific prevention plans that are not coercive or compliance based (see also Child Welfare Policy Manual [8.6A](#) and [8.6B](#) dated 2/28/23 from the Children's Bureau with guidance regarding key aspects of Family First, including pathways to prevention services and the child-specific prevention plan).

Conclusion

The Family First Prevention Services Act provides new opportunities to reimagine how families are supported and strengthened through a meaningful partnership between child welfare and home visiting services. Creating a shared vision and theory of change for using strengths-based home visiting services has the potential to transform how the U.S. supports and empowers families. New opportunities are emerging to build capacity in home visiting and child welfare to prevent child abuse and neglect from ever occurring and thus reduce the likelihood of foster care entry. Over time there will be less need for capacity in child protective services. This shift could be monumental and planning strategically together now makes this possibility more achievable.

Postscript

There have been many societal and environmental changes since the enactment of the Family First legislation five years ago. The multiple crises endured by families over the past few years, including horrific acts of racial violence in the U.S. and the global COVID-19 pandemic, raised awareness and many demanded actions be taken to address inequities in systems across the country. Families and workforce practitioners must be included as partners and leaders as systems leaders at all levels contemplate the redesign of services and supports that effectively address the issues raised by families. Since the plenary discussion at the 2022 National Home Visiting Summit, on-the-ground implementation of Family First has continued to evolve. The major themes surfaced by the plenary session and this subsequent brief continue to reflect the early implementation experiences of many states. The future of Family First implementation will require intentional strategies to scale home visiting capacity including flexibility across funding streams, payment models, and workforce readiness to effectively reach more families and prevent child protective services from becoming involved in their lives. This will include evaluation and examination of home visiting models to allow a broader range of model options. It will be important for researchers, policymakers, and others involved in home visiting and child welfare to monitor implementation at the federal, state, and local levels, engage and learn from families and providers, and document lessons learned on an on-going basis in order to realize the promise of the Family First Prevention Services Act.

Statement of Independence and Integrity

Chapin Hall

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Chapin Hall partners with policymakers, practitioners, and philanthropists at the forefront of research and policy development by applying a unique blend of scientific research, real-world experience, and policy expertise to construct actionable information, practical tools, and, ultimately, positive change for children and families.

Established in 1985, Chapin Hall's areas of research include child welfare systems, community capacity to support children and families, and youth homelessness. For more information about Chapin Hall, visit www.chapinhall.org or @Chapin_Hall.

Start Early

Start Early (formerly known as the Ounce of Prevention) is a nonprofit public-private partnership advancing quality early learning and care for families with children, before birth through their earliest years, to help close the opportunity gap. For nearly 40 years, Start Early has delivered best-in-class doula, home visiting and Early Head Start and Head Start programs. Bringing expertise in program delivery, research and evaluation, professional development and policy and advocacy, Start Early works in partnership with communities and other experts to drive systemic change so that millions more children, families and educators can thrive. Learn more at www.StartEarly.org.

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