“Child health and developmental outcomes depend to a large extent on the capabilities of families to provide a nurturing, safe environment for their infants and young children. Unfortunately, many families have insufficient knowledge about parenting skills and an inadequate support system of friends, extended family, or professionals to help with or advise them regarding child rearing. Home-visiting programs offer a mechanism for ensuring that at-risk families have social support, linkage with public and private community services, and ongoing health, developmental, and safety education. When these services are part of a system of high quality well-child care linked or integrated with the pediatric medical home, they have the potential to mitigate health and developmental outcome disparities.”

*-* [American Academy of Pediatrics Policy Statement](http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/123/2/598.full.pdf%2Bhtml) on Preschool Home Visiting Programs (2009)

In recent years, the importance of high quality, evidence-based home visiting programs has become more apparent with the expansion of knowledge on early brain and child development, the negative effect of adverse childhood experiences, and the resilience offered by nurturing support structures.

[Wisconsin’s Family Foundations Home Visiting](https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/mch/homevisits.htm) (FFHV) program started as a child abuse prevention program in 1994. Under the Affordable Care Act, there was an infusion of federal dollars into the program, allowing for expansion and a more robust system of benchmarking and monitoring. Since then, the State has increased its investment in home visiting and the program has expanded further.

Some facts about FFHV:

* The program is housed within the Wisconsin Department of Children and Families (DCF), with cross-department support from the Department of Health Services (DHS) and Division of Public Health (DPH). FFHV is currently supported by braided federal and state funding.
* Federal funding requires evidence-based home visiting program models with reporting metrics.
* FFHV is a voluntary program offering family supports, coaching and resource coordination to parents and their children (0-5 years) during and after pregnancy. The inclusion of the prenatal period has been shown to improve effectiveness of the program.
* FFHV provides weekly or bimonthly visits from a qualified provider (nurse, parent educator or family support worker, all with appropriate training based on their model requirements).
* Programs focus on prenatal care access, promotion of positive parent-child relationships, healthy child development, screening and assessment, referral for additional support, and care coordination.

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Wisconsin programs use one of four evidence-based home visiting models with proven results:

* Early Head Start
* Healthy Families America (HFA)
* Nurse-Family Partnership
* Parents as Teachers

One of the largest programs in the state is Empowering Families Milwaukee, housed within the Milwaukee Public Health Department. It uses the Healthy Families America (HFA) model, which pairs nurse-social worker teams.

In Wisconsin, nearly 80 percent of home visiting staff have bachelor’s degrees or more advanced degrees, from a variety of disciplines including nursing, social work, early childhood education and psychology.

Reporting metrics are organized into six benchmark areas:

* Improved maternal and child health
* Reduction in child injuries, abuse and neglect
* Improved school readiness and achievement
* Reduction in domestic violence
* Improved family economic self-sufficiency
* Improved coordination and referral for other community resources and support

There are additional evidence-based home visiting programs that are not part of the FFHV program. The [Supporting Families Together Association](https://supportingfamiliestogether.org/) (SFTA) offers a [directory](http://supportingfamiliestogether.org/wp-content/uploads/WI-Home-Visiting-Program-Directory.xlsm) of evidence-based home visiting programs available throughout the state. SFTA also offers additional resources related to early childhood education and family support.

Home visiting enhances early childhood systems and supports cross-system collaboration between DCF, DHS and Department of Public Instruction programs. Building the infrastructure to allow such cross-system collaboration has been important, and recent federal funding and increased funding through the Wisconsin State Budget has helped make this happen. DCF continues to measure the impact of FFHV through internal and external evaluation.

Home visitors can give medical professionals a broader perspective on a family’s life. Home visitors support the medical home in many ways, such as discouraging use of the emergency room in favor of the medical home, assisting with health literacy and other issues at home, and reinforcing recommendations made by pediatricians. Pediatricians can learn about home visiting programs in their communities and participate in development of such programs as possible.

The synergy of home visitors working with pediatricians has the potential to create positive effects on child health and development. Communication between pediatricians and home visitors is important in order to make this happen.

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