



# Promoting Family Engagement in Home Visiting: An Overview of Innovative Efforts

## Introduction

Research suggests that engaging families in home visiting services is essential for achieving positive outcomes. Promoting family engagement is challenging for the field, however, and agencies use different measures to gauge success. This issue brief summarizes three initiatives designed to promote family engagement in home visiting:

- ✔ District of Columbia Home Visiting Innovation Award Project
- ✔ Oklahoma Home Visiting Innovation Award Project
- ✔ Coalition for Research on Engagement and Well-Being

The first two initiatives are made possible through the Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting Program (MIECHV) administered by the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA). The third is supported by the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

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# District of Columbia Home Visiting Innovation Award Project

**About:** In fiscal year 2017, the District of Columbia received a HRSA Home Visiting Innovation Award to identify strategies for promoting family engagement and retention. The initiative focuses on home visitors and their supervisors to encourage joint problem solving during supervision meetings.

**Goals and Purpose:** The project's primary goal is to increase the length of times families remain actively enrolled in home visiting programs. Home visitors and supervisors receive training in the Facilitating Attuned INteractions (FAN) tool used by the Fussy Baby Network at Erikson Institute to better identify and meet families' needs. They will also learn family engagement strategies compiled by the Home Visiting Collaborative Improvement and Innovation Network (HV ColIN). The project includes an evaluation component to measure FAN's potential impact.

**Who is Involved:** The District of Columbia Department of Health serves as the lead agency. Fussy Baby Network Executive Director Linda Gilkerson, who developed FAN, will help train and coach staff from Mary's Center, a local agency that delivers home visiting services. Faculty from Georgetown University will evaluate related activities.

**Notable Details:** The FAN training provides a common language and framework for home visitors and supervisors (see sidebar).

Staff receive different levels of training based on their needs. Home visitors complete booster sessions following the initial FAN training, for example, while program managers complete monthly coaching calls with trainers. Management staff will become certified FAN trainers to support the initiative's sustainability.

**Accomplishments:** To date, the project team has—

- ✔ Trained 10 home visitors and program managers to use the FAN tool
- ✔ Begun monthly coaching calls with FAN trainers and program managers
- ✔ Provided an in-person refresher training on continuous quality improvement (CQI)
- ✔ Formed CQI teams
- ✔ Developed plans for replicating the [HV ColIN plan, do, study, act \(PDSA\) cycles](#) to promote family engagement

The FAN framework includes three key components:

- Home visitor awareness and control of their emotional reactions and behaviors during home visits
- Mid-visit check-ins to ensure home visitors and families understand their goals for that visit
- End-of-visit check-ins to reflect on each visit and plan for the next one

**Implications:** Home visitors will benefit from learning concrete strategies for engaging with families, particularly those that use tools supported by empirical evidence. By replicating the HV CollIN PDSA cycles, the project team is creating and testing additional CQI tools and strategies to improve family engagement.

**Upcoming Activities:** Project staff will continue their work replicating HV CollIN PDSA cycles on family engagement. Additionally, Mary's Center staff will—

- ✔ Participate in FAN booster training sessions
- ✔ Provide data on implementation of FAN techniques
- ✔ Participate in level two FAN training to become certified FAN trainers

**For More Information:** Visit the web sites for the [District of Columbia Department of Health](#) and the [Fussy Baby Network](#). You can also view a [family engagement toolkit](#) on the HV CollIN web site.

## Oklahoma Home Visiting Innovation Award Project

**About:** In fiscal year 2017, Oklahoma received a HRSA Home Visiting Innovation Award to establish a learning collaborative that collects and promotes new measures of family engagement.

**Goals and Purpose:** The project team seeks to establish a learning collaborative to promote family engagement. For example, organizers hope to identify measures of family engagement beyond commonly used administrative indicators such as frequency and duration of services. A more long-term goal is to assess relationships between family engagement levels and child and family outcomes. The learning collaborative will be modeled after HV CollIN, which uses key driver diagrams to identify aims and the elements needed to accomplish them.



We had a key driver diagram with change ideas we thought would impact family attrition and engagement, but few local programs elected to focus on family engagement in prior CQI work. This time around, we are fortunate to embed this work within the innovation award and pursue it at the level [at which] we think it needs the attention.

David Bard, University of Oklahoma

**Who is Involved:** The Oklahoma State Department of Health received the innovation award, and the University of Oklahoma serves as the lead agency. Additional partners include the University of Kansas, which carries out qualitative research efforts, and the University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center, which is leading the collection of family biomarker data.

**Notable Details:** Recipients of Oklahoma's innovation award will—

- ✔ Test the implementation of [Lemonade for Life](#), a curriculum that teaches families about adverse childhood experiences to build their resilience
- ✔ Follow home visitors on family visits to collect extensive qualitative data to be coded using the Home Visit Rating Scales (HOVRS)
- ✔ Examine relationships between family engagement and the quality of parent-child interactions using biomarker data, specifically cortisol levels and electrical activity of the brain (i.e., electroencephalography, or EEG )

**Accomplishments:** To date, Oklahoma has—

- ✔ Completed the first CQI learning session for the learning collaborative
- ✔ Begun monthly coaching calls for the learning collaborative
- ✔ Provided training and consultation on the Lemonade for Life curriculum
- ✔ Trained research staff on HOVRS and consulted with its developers to plan for qualitative data collection
- ✔ Started extensive data collection for the evaluation component

**Implications:** Oklahoma will release materials from the learning collaborative to educate the public on effective and promising strategies to promote family engagement. Evaluation of the collaborative will contribute new knowledge to the field. For example, evaluators will assess relationships between new and existing measures of family engagement. The evaluation may also provide insight into variations in family engagement levels and the quality of parent-child outcomes as presented by biomarker indicators.

**Upcoming Activities:** The University of Oklahoma and its partners will—

- ✔ Carry out three CQI learning sessions and continue monthly coaching calls
- ✔ Collect ethnographic data by accompanying 48 home visitors, including data gleaned from observations and interviews with home visitors and families
- ✔ Collect biomarker data, specifically cortisol and EEG readings, around the quality of parent-child interactions

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# Coalition for Research on Engagement and Well-Being

**About:** In late 2015, the Georgia State University School of Public Health funded three pilot projects designed to strengthen family engagement in home visiting. The projects, which were implemented as cooperative agreements, were supported by a grant received from the Annie E. Casey Foundation to form the Coalition for Research on Engagement and Well-Being (CREW).

**Goals and Purpose:** CREW awarded project funds to small and innovative developmental studies that could generate new knowledge to improve family engagement and outcomes. The selected projects also have the potential to apply to multiple home visiting models.

**Who is Involved:** Georgia State University administers funds awarded by CREW and manages a working group of home visiting experts to advise selected projects.

**Notable Details:** CREW funded and supported three project pilots, which wrapped up in July 2017 (see below).

## Pilot projects included—

### Mixed Methods Adaptation and Pilot Testing of a Toolkit to Enhance Parent Participation in Home Visitation Programs

**Project Leads:** Danielle Fettes, University of California, San Diego; Rachel Haine-Schlagel, San Diego State University

**Overview:** The study adapted the Parent and Caregiver Active Participation (PACT) toolkit used in mental health settings for use in the SafeCare home visiting model. The modified toolkit was pilot tested with 6 home visitors and 18 parents for 6 months. Data were collected on client engagement and implementation outcomes.

**Initial Findings:** Overall, parents had positive responses to the toolkit. Home visitors were fairly satisfied, but felt the toolkit could be better integrated with the SafeCare model.

### Engagement in Home Visiting Services During the Perinatal Period: A Mixed Methods Pilot Study

**Project Leads:** Amy Damashek, Western Michigan University; Catherine Kothari, Western Michigan University

**Overview:** This project examined the potential impact of client, provider, and program factors on program retention among mothers who had given birth. Researchers gathered quantitative and qualitative data from 39 mothers participating in three home visiting programs (Healthy Families America, Healthy Start, and Nurse-Family Partnership). Home visitors and supervisors also participated in focus groups.

**Initial Findings:** Results indicated that mothers' favorable perceptions of their relationship with their home visitors, as well their home visitors' cultural competency, increased the likelihood of engaging with services postpartum. Mothers also expressed the importance of home visitors providing them information and possessing personal qualities such as being supportive, reliable, and collaborative.

### Delivering Home Visitation through Telehealth Applications: Parents as Teachers @ USC Telehealth

**Project Leads:** Dorian Traube, University of Southern California; Angela Rau, Parents as Teachers (PAT)

**Overview:** The PAT national office partnered with the University of Southern California Telehealth Clinic (USC Telehealth) to deliver home visiting services via telehealth videoconferencing. The study's pilot phase focused on providing training and support to participating home visitors. Phase two of the study, conducted in 2017, focused on continued family recruitment, educator training, and an assessment of retention and fidelity rates.

**Initial Findings:** Families are generally interested in this alternative way of receiving services, and the initiative has already expanded from 15 to 65 families. Future work will include an effectiveness trial to examine participant outcomes, with the potential goal of serving even more families.

**Accomplishments:** To date, CREW has—

- ✔ Developed a framework to capture multiple dimensions of family engagement
- ✔ Facilitated site visits to support project implementation and dissemination of preliminary findings
- ✔ Collaborated with an expert working group to provide consultation on projects

**Implications:** The CREW pilot projects explore innovative efforts that can help models better understand and support family engagement. Project findings have the potential to inform research and practice across multiple home visiting models and implementation settings.

**Upcoming Activities:** Project leads will release their final analyses and publications of research outcomes.

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## Summary

Engaging families in home visiting services comes with many challenges that extend across program models and contexts. To navigate these obstacles, home visitors and supervisors need targeted support and guidance. The initiatives presented in this brief highlight a variety of innovative approaches to better understand and promote family engagement. Initial work suggests that efforts should include CQI techniques; use concrete strategies, frameworks, and curricula that can strengthen home visitors' interpersonal and engagement skills; and explore new measures of family engagement.