



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
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## **Pennsylvania Expands Home Visiting Support to First-Time Mothers and Children with Special Needs**

**Harrisburg, PA** – The Wolf Administration announced today that, under the guidance of the Department of Human Services (DHS), it is expanding home visiting supports to first-time mothers and mothers of children with special needs covered by Medicaid. The expansion, made possible in collaboration with physical health Medicaid managed care organizations (MCOs), will guarantee at least two home visits to new parents and families with children with additional risk factors across Pennsylvania, expanding access to evidence-based models that promote and support healthy child and family development.

“There is no more important focus of my administration than giving all children and families a strong start,” Gov. Wolf said. “By expanding access to evidence-based home visiting programs, we will put more kids, parents and families on a path to a healthy, happy future.”

Since 2015, investments totaling nearly \$16.5 million in state funds have helped increase the number of children and families who can receive home visiting supports in communities around Pennsylvania. Guaranteeing a minimum of two home visits to all first-time mothers and mothers of children with special needs through Medicaid continues this work.

“Being a parent can be a challenge for anyone,” said Secretary Miller. “Because children don’t come with an instruction manual home visiting programs create support systems for families to learn to better understand children’s needs, monitor milestones, and identify other opportunities for support that can continue to facilitate healthy long-term growth. A home visitor can be a major resource for parents to bond with their child(ren) and create bridges to success in early childhood and primary education.”

The home visiting expansion is effective January 1, 2020 through the MCOs’ 2020 agreement. Under the new agreements, MCOs will be required to establish an evidenced-based, standardized maternal, infant and early childhood home visitation program for all first-time parents and parents of infants with additional risk factors. All parents and children identified through this effort will receive at least two home visits at no cost, and depending on need, may be referred to other established home visiting programs to continue these services. DHS expects that these programs will be in place with eligible new parents receiving home visiting services by July 1, 2020.

Evidence-based home visiting family support programs have a family-centered focus and strength-based approach that works with both the child and parent. A home visitor can help

parents gain the skills and connect to resources necessary to improve their family's health, safety, economic security, and success in early childhood education. Studies of various nurse-family partnership programs have shown positive impacts for the mother and baby during pregnancy and after birth, such as a decrease in domestic violence and smoking during pregnancy, a significant decrease in pre-term births, and a majority of babies being born at a healthy weight.

Home visiting can also improve parents' child development knowledge and skills, help develop social support systems, and improve access to education, health, and community services.

Examples of services include:

- Regularly scheduled home visits with trained family development specialists;
- Monthly parent meetings; and
- Routine screenings to identify post-partum depression and detect potential problems with vision, hearing, growth, and learning age-based milestones.

Gov. Wolf is committed to helping the youngest Pennsylvanians. In September, his Ready to Start Task Force released its report, including two priorities tied directly to home visiting: to "increase availability of high-quality childcare and home-visiting service slots" and to "promote education, engagement, and support of parents and families as children's first teachers."

"This significantly expanded access to home visiting truly helps to fulfill our mission for increasing the ways to help our youngest residents get a strong, focused beginning," Gov. Wolf said.

Read the Ready to Start Task Force report [here](#).

For more information on home visiting programs, visit [www.dhs.pa.gov](http://www.dhs.pa.gov).

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