

Evaluating and Supporting Pennsylvania's Home Visiting Programs

Statement of Problem

Home visiting programs provide voluntary, in-home services to under-resourced pregnant mothers and families of young children. Since 2010, the Health and Resources Administration (HRSA) in partnership with the Administration of Children and Families (ACF) has supported the expansion of evidence-based home visiting programs into communities across the country through the Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) Program. MIECHV allows states, territories, and tribal entities to maintain and grow the evidence-based or promising programs of their choice—all of which support important aspects of child and family well-being including maternal and caregiver health, parenting and child development promotion approaches and school readiness.

The MIECHV investment supports states' growth of evidence-based and promising home visiting services along with evaluation of home visiting performance. The focus on evaluation is critical, as the impact of these programs may be influenced by the way they are implemented across a diversity of clients, staff, health systems, and geographies within and across states nationwide.

Part of the multi-pronged data and evaluation requirements for MIECHV include a required needs assessment conducted every four years to identify the communities most in need of services and assess current capacity of home visiting programming so they can strategically allocate resources for these community-based public health services. Needs assessments are foundational public health tools for assessing a population's risks, strengths, opportunities and trends over time.

Description

The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania has been a national leader in supporting rigorous evaluation efforts of state-funded early childhood programs. PolicyLab partnered with Pennsylvania's Office of Child Development and Early Learning (OCDEL) on the evaluation of the state's MIECHV-funded home visiting programs (Nurse-Family Partnership, Parents as Teachers, Early Head Start and Healthy Families America) between 2011-2017.

Over the five years of conducting this evaluation, we learned a lot about how the expansion of home visiting services through federal funding has worked for Pennsylvanian families. For example, families are highly satisfied with the services they receive through these programs and feel participation helps socially and mentally prepare their children for school. On the other hand, we also identified areas that need additional attention, including injury prevention. For a comprehensive overview of our evaluation results, read [this blog post](#) or watch [this webinar](#).

More recently, PolicyLab partnered with OCDEL to conduct a county-level needs assessment of the health of children, mothers, and families as well as the social and environmental conditions of communities across the state during the period of January 2019 to October 2020. Utilizing numerous methods of data collection, such as community surveys and stakeholder interviews, the 2020 Family Support Needs Assessment categorizes

Pennsylvania's 67 counties as having low, moderate, or elevated need across six domains: maternal and child health, socioeconomic status, substance use, child safety and maltreatment, community environment and child care. Additionally, the report spotlights local service providers who are making a difference in addressing the elevated needs of their communities.

The assessment showed improvement across several maternal and child health outcomes since the last report in 2014, such as:

- Improved rates of preterm and teen births (for nearly every county)
- Infant mortality (60% of counties saw improvements)
- Childhood poverty (almost half of counties saw a reduction in the percentage of children under age 5 living in poverty)

The report also sheds light on areas of need. Overall, findings demonstrate that substance use, mental health, economic needs (e.g., unemployment), and intimate partner violence are among the most pronounced issues facing families of young children across urban and rural communities in Pennsylvania. It is important to note that all data collection occurred prior to COVID-19, and the team anticipates that the pandemic exacerbated many areas of community need. View the "Research in Motion" video below for an overview of our findings and the methods we developed to support communities with identifying local maternal and child health needs.

Read the [full 2020 Family Support Needs Assessment](#) and [one-page summary](#) on the Department of Human Services' [website](#), as well as a [press release](#) that outlines the key findings from the needs assessment. We also developed a set of topic-specific briefs with data reviews from the 2020 Pennsylvania Family Support Needs Assessment, including:

- [The Role of Housing in Health](#)
- [Addressing Opioid Use in Pregnant and Postpartum People](#)

Next Steps

The team continues to disseminate the needs assessment findings to communities across Pennsylvania, breaking down the results into digestible briefs and blog posts focused on specific issues. We also continue to be involved in work to [evaluate](#) and support [family-serving programs](#) in the Commonwealth and are designing and testing innovative new models of delivering [community-based family support programs](#) in [collaboration with health systems](#).

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PolicyLab Leads

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Director

Dr. Matone's research interests include maternal and young child health, as well as family well-being. She focuses on building community and public agency research partnerships to support improvements in policies and programs that serve mothers and infants in under-resourced communities. She is experienced in large-scale program evaluation, mixed-methods research designs, and use of administrative data for observational study designs in areas of child and caregiver health.

Dr. Matone is a senior fellow at the University of Pennsylvania's Leonard Davis Institute of Health Economics, a faculty affiliate at The Field Center, and a board member of the Pennsylvania Association for the Education of Youth Children. Dr. Matone received her Doctor of Public Health, specializing in child and adolescent health and development, from Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health. She is an alumnus of the Doris Duke Fellowship for the Promotion of Child Well-being program and a former Stoneleigh Foundation fellow.



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Team

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Research Scientist

Jennifer Whittaker (she/her) is a research scientist at PolicyLab and the senior manager of qualitative methods training and program development with the Qualitative Research Core at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia (CHOP).

Dr. Whittaker has over a decade of experience conducting qualitative and mixed-method research, with a particular focus on community-engaged research. As a member of the Qualitative Research Core, she develops and leads training in qualitative research methods and provides research design and conceptual support to

research teams across CHOP. At PolicyLab, Dr. Whittaker is a member of the maternal health research team where her work focuses on the role of place and public systems in supporting maternal and child health. She serves as the staff lead for the Family and Community Health Portfolio and is an advisory board member for the Community Partnerships in Research program. She is also a member of CHOP's Qualitative Methods Research Affinity Group, a fellow at University at Pennsylvania's Center for Public Health Initiatives and a board member for the Pennsylvania Rural Health Association.

An alumnus of Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's Health Policy Research Scholars Leadership Development Program, Dr. Whittaker is trained in interdisciplinary, applied and policy-oriented scholarship. She completed her PhD in city planning at the University of Pennsylvania Weitzman School of Design, where her research led to [Our Rural Pennsylvania](#), an atlas created by mothers and caregivers to record the everyday places that influence their health. She completed her master's degree in urban and regional planning at the University at Buffalo and her bachelor's degree in geography at the State University of New York at Geneseo. Prior to coming to Philadelphia, Dr. Whittaker was a research associate at the Food Systems Planning and Healthy Communities Lab where she conducted research on the role of local government policy and planning in facilitating healthy communities.



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Administrative Manager

Katherine Kellom (she/they) is an administrative manager at PolicyLab and the director of the Qualitative Research Core at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia. She has worked at nationally top-ranked institutions with teams comprised of experts in their fields conducting qualitative, mixed and multi-method research for more than ten years. Beginning as a research assistant at the University of Pennsylvania's Mixed Methods Research Lab, Katherine currently serves across a variety of project teams to provide conceptual and technical support for clinical and community-based research projects. She has extensive knowledge and valuable practical experience applying qualitative research methodologies with a focus on integrating key stakeholder perspectives and goals into research designs.

Katherine leads and advises project teams using qualitative methods to achieve research aims on projects ranging from small pilots to state-wide, mixed-methods evaluations. Katherine is an expert in facilitation techniques and in the use of the qualitative data analysis tool, NVivo; she provides training in both areas. As director of the Qualitative Research Core, Katherine manages and supports staff members and qualitative team members in the Core and at PolicyLab, ensuring skillset development and access to the resources needed to contribute high-quality work to various project teams.

Katherine received her Bachelor of Arts degree from Bryn Mawr College in 2009, majoring in psychology.



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Senior Research Manager

Stephanie Garcia (she/her) is a senior research manager at PolicyLab at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia. She oversees the day-to-day activities of several community-engaged, mixed-methods research and evaluation projects and supports strategic planning and team building for a team of maternal and child health (MCH) researchers. She has methodologic and content expertise in program evaluation, participatory research methods and public health systems. Her research interests include maternal and early childhood well-being; intimate partner violence and community violence; and understanding how organizations/systems can effectively work together to support families.

Prior to PolicyLab, she coordinated a Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA)-funded technical assistance center at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health that focused on supporting state agencies in adopting evidence-informed MCH programs/practices. She received her Master of Public Health in community health sciences, specializing in MCH, from the University of Illinois at Chicago.



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Clinical Research Program Manager

Tara Dechert (she/her) is a clinical research program manager at PolicyLab at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia. She oversees the implementation of initiatives that bridge care between home and community-based services with office-based pediatric preventive care delivery systems to positively impact child

health. Ms. Dechert's work aims to ensure that pregnant women and their children receive the best possible care by providing a holistic approach to their overall health, well-being and education. To be successful, a goal of this work is to improve efficiencies across service delivery systems by focusing on intentional coordination of obstetrical and pediatric care with that of community health nursing and early childhood efforts.

Throughout her professional career, Ms. Dechert has worked to improve policies, services, research and outcomes for vulnerable children and families—all with an emphasis on quality and public/private resource efficiency. She has extensive experience in the not-for-profit and government sectors conducting assessment and evaluation of policies and government-funded programs as well as advocacy and strategic planning. Areas of expertise include evidence-based program development and implementation and community health nursing through home visiting. She holds a Bachelor of Arts in Social Work from Elizabethtown College and a Master of Science in Administration of Justice from Shippensburg University.



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