

Alberta Children's Services

# Guidelines for Home Visitation Programs

*Parents and communities working  
together for their children...*



November 2004

**These *Guidelines for Home Visitation Programs* were developed** by Alberta Children's Services in consultation with the province's Child and Family Services Authorities and the Alberta Home Visitation Network Association.

**Project Manager**

Leann Wagner, Manager, Initiative Development, Alberta Children's Services

**Working Group**

Cameron Dunn, Contract Specialist, Central Alberta Region Child and Family Services Authority

Michele Montgomery, Early Intervention/Family Violence Specialist,  
Southwest Alberta Region Child and Family Services Authority

Lavonne Roloff, Coordinator, Alberta Home Visitation Network Association

Shauna Seneca, Executive Director, Bent Arrow Traditional Healing Society

Marianne Symons, Program Manager, Calgary Regional Home Visitation Collaborative

Linda West, Executive Director, Healthy Families Healthy Futures

**For more information or for additional  
copies of this document, contact**

Alberta Children's Services  
Community Strategies Division, Community Partnerships Branch  
6th floor, Sterling Place  
9940 – 106 Street  
Edmonton, Alberta T5K 2N2  
Phone: (780) 422-5679 (in Edmonton)  
310-0000 (toll free within Alberta)  
Fax: (780) 422-5036



# Guidelines for Home Visitation Programs

*Parents and communities working together for their children...*

<b>1</b>	<b>About This Document.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>About Home Visitation Programs .....</b>	<b>5</b>
	Background.....	6
	Program Delivery and Funding.....	6
	Objectives .....	7
	Clients .....	8
	Beliefs .....	8
	Values and Principles .....	9
<b>3</b>	<b>Program Components and Standards .....</b>	<b>11</b>
	Community Partnerships .....	11
	Coordinated Service Delivery.....	13
	Information and Referrals .....	14
	Building Awareness and Reaching Out.....	16
	Screening and Assessment.....	17
	Home Visits.....	19
	Voluntary Participation .....	20
	Early Intervention .....	20
	Intensive, Long-Term Delivery .....	21
	Service Plans .....	21
<b>4</b>	<b>Administrative Procedures and Standards .....</b>	<b>23</b>
	Program Design and Contracts .....	23
	Legal Requirements .....	24
	Confidentiality, Disclosure and Informed Consent .....	24
	Duty to Report .....	25
	Staffing and Supervision.....	26
	Home Visitors' Qualifications .....	26

Caseloads .....	27
Supervision and Safety .....	28
Monitoring, Record-Keeping and Reporting .....	29
Record-Keeping and Reporting.....	30
Program Monitoring .....	31
<b>5 Roles and Responsibilities .....</b>	<b>33</b>
Alberta Children's Services .....	33
Child and Family Services Authorities.....	34
Home Visiting Service Providers .....	35
Home Visitors .....	36
Families Who Participate in Home Visitation Programs.....	36
<b>6 Appendix.....</b>	<b>37</b>
Program Contacts.....	37
Resources.....	39
Selected Bibliography .....	41

## About This Document

These *Guidelines for Home Visitation Programs* were developed by the Alberta Ministry of Children’s Services in consultation with the province’s Child and Family Services Authorities and representatives of the Alberta Home Visitation Network Association (AHVNA).

The guidelines apply to home visitation programs funded by Alberta Children’s Services. They are designed to

- interpret relevant legislation as it applies to home visitation programs
- outline best practices, set quality standards and define expectations with regard to the development, delivery, monitoring and evaluation of home visitation programs
- communicate program-related policy to stakeholders who deliver home visitation services
- improve the contract management practices, administration and delivery methods of home visitation programs
- support Alberta’s Child and Family Services Authorities in their role as contract managers of home visitation programs
- improve the quality of services delivered to program clients

This document addresses a number of areas.

**Chapter 2 defines the parameters of Alberta’s home visitation programs.** It outlines the programs’ purpose, objectives, values and principles. It

### About AHVNA

The **Alberta Home Visitation Network Association** is a member-driven, not-for-profit society that promotes quality home visitation programs in the province. The association provides its members with training opportunities, evaluation resources and information about standards and best practices. It serves as a forum for networking and for input on policy-related issues.

For more information, visit the association website at <[www.ahvna.org](http://www.ahvna.org)>.

explains how the programs are funded and administered and identifies the clients they are intended to serve.

**Chapter 3 outlines standards and expectations** for the various components of home visitation programs funded by Alberta Children's Services. Program components include

- community partnerships
- information and referrals
- screening and assessment
- home visits

**Chapter 4 outlines administrative procedures and standards** with regard to program design and contracts, legal requirements (pertaining to confidentiality and information management), staffing, reporting, record-keeping and performance measurement.

**Chapter 5 describes the roles and responsibilities** of the various stakeholders involved in home visitation programs funded by the Ministry of Children's Services. These include the Ministry itself, regional Child and Family Services Authorities, service agencies contracted to deliver home visitation programs, agency staff and families who participate in home visitation programs.

**The appendices** include contact information, a selected bibliography and a list of resources.

### Definitions

**The Ministry** is Alberta's Ministry of Children's Services.

**The Minister** refers to Alberta's Minister of Children's Services.

**CFSAs** are Alberta's **Child and Family Services Authorities**, which deliver programs on behalf of the Minister in 10 regions of the province.



## About Home Visitation Programs

Home visitation programs funded by Alberta Children’s Services reflect a partnership-based, early-intervention strategy designed to foster healthy child development. The programs serve families who face challenges that may place their children at risk and keep them from developing to their full potential.

Through home visitation programs, parents, families, trained home visitors and community agencies *work together* to raise healthy, well-adjusted children who can succeed at learning and achieve their full potential.

Home visitation programs are centred in the family home and supported by the community at large.

Trained home visitors provide families with **information** and **support** that helps them improve their parenting skills and provide a safe, nurturing environment for their children. Home visitors also link families to a network of **community services and resources** they can use to provide their children with a good start in life.

Participation in home visitation programs is voluntary. Program services are based on family needs and provided at no cost to participants.

### Challenges to Healthy Child Development

Healthy child development is affected by a broad range of social, economic, environmental, cultural and lifestyle factors. Many families struggle with day-to-day living and face a host of challenges that make it difficult for them to give their children a good start in life. These challenges may include

- inexperience
- social isolation
- lack of family or community support
- unemployment
- illness
- lack of education
- a history of abuse or neglect
- poverty

Alberta’s home visitation programs use standardized screening and assessment tools to identify families whose circumstances may hinder healthy child development.

**The vision and mission of the Ministry of Children's Services provide a foundation for the objectives, beliefs, values and principles of Alberta's home visitation programs.**

**Mission:** Working together to enhance the ability of families and communities to develop nurturing and safe environments for children, youth and individuals.

**Vision:** Strong children, families and communities...An Alberta where children and youth are valued, nurtured and loved, and develop to their potential, supported by relationships, healthy families, and safe communities. Alberta will be youth and child friendly.

—*Alberta Budget 2004: Children's Services* [online, cited April 19, 2004], <[www.finance.gov.ab.ca/publications/budget/budget\\_2004/child.html](http://www.finance.gov.ab.ca/publications/budget/budget_2004/child.html)>

## Background

Alberta's network of home visitation programs was launched in 2001 in response to recommendations made by the Alberta Children's Forum (1999) and the provincial Task Force on Children at Risk. As a result of these recommendations, Child and Family Services Authorities in each region of the province worked with their delivery partners to enhance existing home visitation programs or develop new programs to meet the particular needs of their communities.

## Program Delivery and Funding

The home visitation programs covered by these guidelines are funded by the Ministry of Children's Services under the authority of the Government Organization Act and associated regulations. Section 2 of the Children's Services Grants Regulation (73/2001) grants the Minister the authority

*a) to support any commitment made by the Minister for the purpose of paying all or part of the costs related to any policies, programs, services or other matters under the Minister's administration, or*

*(b) to support projects, functions, activities or research relating to the safety, security or well-being of children and families.*

The home visitation programs covered by these guidelines are delivered by the province's regional Child and Family Services Authorities (CFSAs) through contracts with qualified service providers.

The home visitation programs in each region conform to province-wide standards and guidelines, and at the same time, reflect local priorities, resources and needs.

## Objectives

Home visitation programs funded by Alberta Children's Services

- promote positive parent–child relationships
  - Home visitors model positive parenting practices and help parents learn to interact with their children in developmentally appropriate ways.
- improve parenting knowledge and skills
  - Home visitation programs provide parents with information about child development, nutrition, safety, injury prevention, appropriate discipline, good communication, problem solving and other skills they need to help their children reach their full potential.
- foster healthy child development
  - By helping parents create a safe, stimulating home environment, home visitation programs give children a healthy start in life.
- help families access the network of formal and informal services and supports available in their own communities
  - Connecting families with community supports reduces social isolation. It helps families build their own support networks and become more self-reliant.

### What is positive parenting?

The term positive parenting describes a parenting style that balances nurturing, discipline and respect. This style of parenting has been shown to contribute to good outcomes for children.

Positive parents create warm, nurturing relationships with their children while setting firm limits on behaviour. Children raised by positive parents tend to be socially competent, well adjusted, respectful and responsible, and do well overall.

- promote family wellness
  - By providing information and support and linking families with their communities, home visitation programs help families cope with the challenges of raising children and prevent child abuse and neglect.
- help build strong communities
  - By building community-based partnerships to meet the needs of families and children, home visitation programs enhance their communities' capacity to plan and deliver services for families with young children.

## Clients

Home visitation programs funded by Alberta Children's Services serve families who face challenges that may place their children at risk and keep them from developing to their full potential.

**The program entry target is parents-to-be and families with children under three months old.** If resources allow, home visitation programs may admit families with children up to 2.5 years old.

Once a child's family becomes a client of a home visitation program, program services can be provided until the child turns six.

## Beliefs

Home visitation programs funded by Alberta Children's Services are based on these beliefs:

- The early years of a child's life are a critical developmental period. Interventions during this time can create the foundation for future success.
- All children—no matter where they live or what special needs their families face—deserve high-quality programs and services.

- All children and families have the right to be protected from all forms of neglect and abuse, including physical, emotional, psychological and sexual abuse.
- Families are the primary caregivers of their children.
- Parenting is a lifelong learning experience. All families have resources and strengths that they bring to this experience.
- Communities play an important role in supporting families and providing children with the positive, supportive environment they need to fulfill their potential.

## Values and Principles

**Home visitation programs value diversity and promote inclusion.** They recognize and respect the fact that families differ in their composition, culture and socio-economic standing.

**Children come first**—in all home visitation program services and activities. The best interests of each child drive all program-related decisions.

**Home visitation programs are *integrated* programs. They connect parents and families with community-based resources.** Home visitation is not a stand-alone program. It complements a range of early-intervention services and supports available to families with young children. It builds networks and partnerships that help community agencies work together to provide a comprehensive range of services to meet the needs of children and families.

**Home visitation programs are flexible.** All home visitation programs funded by Alberta Children's Services follow provincial standards and guidelines. Within this framework, program specifics reflect local needs, priorities and resources. Regional Child and Family Services Authorities work with contracted service providers to deliver home visitation programs that meet the needs of their communities.

**Home visitation programs are accountable.** Families, service providers and community agencies are actively involved in program planning, development and evaluation. This open, inclusive approach ensures public accountability.

**Participation in home visitation programs is voluntary.** Voluntary participation empowers families to set their own goals and make decisions in their own best interests. This increases the effectiveness of home visiting services.

**Home visiting is a planned intervention based on the goals of the family.** Program services are based on family needs. Families who participate in home visitation programs work with program staff to develop and monitor their own service plans and reach their own family goals. Partnerships with community agencies provide families with formal and informal support.

**Home visitation programs focus on young children and provide intensive, long-term early intervention.** Effective home visiting starts early—prenatally or postpartum—to reach families when they are most receptive to information. Effective home visitation programs are intensive and long term.

**Home visitation programs deliver high-quality services that reflect current, evidence-based research findings and best practices.** Program components include standardized screening and assessment tools; experienced, well-trained, culturally sensitive staff; community-based partnerships; ongoing staff training; manageable caseloads; appropriate supervision; formal monitoring; and performance measurement that supports continuous improvement.

## Program Components and Standards

This chapter describes the various components of home visitation programs funded by Alberta Children’s Services. It defines the standards and requirements for all home visitation programs delivered through service contracts administered by the province’s Child and Family Services Authorities.

*The program standards outlined in this chapter and the administrative standards outlined in Chapter 4 facilitate a consistent approach to home visitation services in all regions of the province. **These standards establish minimum expectations.** Regional Child and Family Services Authorities may have additional requirements and standards established through policy or specified in service contracts.*

*The objectives, beliefs, values and principles outlined in Chapter 2 underpin all standards and requirements for home visitation programs funded by Alberta Children’s Services.*

### Community Partnerships

The home visitation programs funded by Alberta Children’s Services are part of a range of community-based services and supports designed to strengthen families, improve parenting skills and foster healthy child development.

In some communities, the agencies that deliver home visitation programs also provide other services to support families and children. In other places, home visitation programs are the sole endeavour of the service agency.

Regardless of their organizational framework, **home visitation programs must be connected to their communities.** The programs play a key role in implementing the Alberta Response Model, which uses “community-based

resources and wisdom” in order to “improve outcomes for children, youth and families that come into contact with child welfare.”

**Home visitation program staff must build networks and partnerships with other community agencies. They must be active participants in community-based local planning groups.**

Home visitors are uniquely positioned to identify families who are at high risk for violence or abuse and who need professional intervention. Making referrals to appropriate community agencies is key to ensuring that families get the services they need. (For details about information and referrals, see p. 14.)

To be effective in this role, home visitation programs must build networks and partnerships with community agencies that provide child protection, school readiness, housing assistance, job training, public health, primary health care and other family services. Partnerships help ensure that

**Alberta has a wide range of community-based programs and agencies that support families and children.**

- early intervention programs
- family literacy programs
- Parent Link centres
- programs to prevent Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder
- resources for children with disabilities
- child care providers
- Family and Community Support Services
- Regional Health Authorities

- home visitation program staff are knowledgeable about community resources and can refer families to the appropriate agencies
- staff of other agencies know about the home visitation program and can refer families who would benefit from home visiting services
- program resources are not wasted and efforts are not duplicated across agencies
- collaborative case management strategies are developed for families who move from one program to another within the community
- families get the services they need through a coordinated, integrated, community-based approach

## Standards

Alberta Children's Services–funded home visitation programs and regional Child and Family Services Authorities have protocols for families who receive child protection or family enhancement services as well as home visiting services. The protocols outline details with respect to family referrals, documentation, information sharing and collaboration on service teams.

Home visitation programs participate, when appropriate, in partnership-based community planning or advisory activities.

Home visitation programs are active in building and developing networks of service delivery partners. They are active participants in these networks.

Home visitation program staff are knowledgeable about community resources.

## Coordinated Service Delivery

Coordinated service delivery is supported by the development of service protocols or agreements between home visitation programs and other delivery partners. Service agreements should outline

- the services each organization will provide, **recognizing that participation in home visitation programs is voluntary**
  - Although a service agreement may specify that a family will make the transition from another community-based program to a home visitation program, this transition cannot be enforced without the family's cooperation and consent.
- the referral process
- reporting requirements

- how client information will be managed
  - With the family's consent, home visitation programs share information with other delivery partners whenever possible.
- mechanisms for conflict resolution

### Standards

Home visitation programs work in partnership with other agencies to develop service protocols that facilitate coordinated service delivery in the community.

## Information and Referrals

Standardized screening and assessment tools are used to identify families who could benefit from participating in a home visitation program. (See p. 17 for details.)

Once a family has been assessed, staff determine if home visitation is an appropriate option. If it is, and if the family agrees, parents and program staff work together to establish a visiting schedule and develop a service plan. (See p. 21 for details.)

If home visitation is not appropriate or if a family declines participation, program staff provide information and referrals to other services and supports available in the community.

Home visitation program staff also refer families to community services they can use *in conjunction with* the home visitation program. In some cases, the family's participation in supplementary programs is not critical for achieving the goals of its service plan. In these cases, acting on the home visitor's referral is left up to the family.

When a home visitor refers a family to a program or service that *is* critical for the service plan, he or she also helps the family "make the connection." The home visitor's support can take the form of helping the family phone or contact the program or service, arranging appointments or accompanying the family to service agency offices or appointments.

Once a referral has been made, the home visitor follows up with the family to determine what action was taken and what results were achieved.

*Families make their own decisions about whether or not to follow up or participate in programs and services recommended by home visitation program staff.*

## Standards

Home visitation programs develop community partnerships to facilitate information sharing and inter-agency referrals. (See p. 11 for details.)

Home visitation program staff participate in community networks to ensure they remain knowledgeable about community resources and to develop referral systems.

All families assessed by home visitation program staff are given information about community resources for parents. Families receive this information whether or not home visitation is appropriate for them.

When home visitors refer families to programs or services that are critical for their service plans, they are responsible for

- providing information
- assisting with scheduling or appointments (as required)
- following up with the family to determine the result of the referral

All referrals made to home visitation programs and by home visitation program staff are tracked and reported to the Ministry.

## **Building Awareness and Reaching Out**

Home visitation programs must use positive outreach to promote and build awareness of their services. They must create an environment that helps families feel comfortable and encourages their participation in home visitation.

Even when home visitation programs are recommended, families may choose not to participate. Alternatively, they may accept home visiting services but then change their minds or cancel scheduled visits. In either case, outreach efforts must be continued long enough to give families a chance to learn more about the program, develop rapport with staff and overcome any anxiety they may have about participating.

**It is recommended that outreach efforts be continued for at least three months** before services or attempts to involve a family are discontinued. If outreach is stopped too soon, the family may not have enough time to properly evaluate the benefits of home visiting. On the other hand, since the numbers of program spots are limited, outreach that goes on too long may prevent other families from accessing home visiting services.

### **Standards**

Home visitation programs have written policies and procedures that outline the nature and duration of outreach efforts to families who decline home visiting services or cancel scheduled visits.

## Screening and Assessment

*Home visitation programs are available to families who face challenges that may keep their children from developing to their full potential. (For examples of challenges to healthy child development, see p. 5.) The primary target for program entry is parents-to-be and families with children under three months old. (See p. 20 for details about early intervention.)*

Families who might benefit from home visiting are identified through screening and assessment. Ideally, home visitation programs should coordinate these two activities—both within their own operations and within the community-based service system. This helps families avoid situations in which they are asked the same questions over and over, by different program staff members or different service agencies.

While the approach to screening and assessment varies across the province, standardized tools and processes are used. Standardized tools are

- valid
- reliable
- relatively easy to use
- compatible with other tools used in the community (This facilitates communication and cooperation between delivery partners.)

*In order to provide valid, objective information, standardized tools must be administered in the prescribed manner.*

**Screening is the first step** in identifying families whose circumstances may prevent healthy child development. It is conducted by home visitation program staff or by health and social service professionals such as public health nurses, hospital nurses, family physicians, teachers or social workers.

For newborns and their mothers, screening is typically conducted by Regional Health Authorities (RHAs) as part of their postpartum follow-up. If appropriate, the RHA makes a referral to a home visitation program, which then assesses the family's suitability for home visiting.

Other agencies may also screen young children and make referrals to a home visitation program. Or families can request home visiting services directly, without a referral or screening by another individual or agency.

**Standardized Screening Tools**

For newborns and their mothers, commonly used screening tools include the Parkyn Postpartum Screening Tool and the Edinburgh Postnatal Depression Scale.

Screening determines if further evaluation is necessary. It is **typically followed by assessment**, which addresses both child- and family-related risk factors and provides a more detailed and definitive evaluation of a family's situation.

Assessment documents the family's strengths, needs and resources and determines if participating in a home visitation program would be beneficial.

If home visitation is appropriate, and if families agree to participate, the results of the assessment form the basis of their service plans. (See p. 21 for details.) If

**Standardized Assessment Tools**

Commonly used assessment tools include DISC, the Hawaii Early Learning Profile, the Kempe Family Stress Checklist and the Healthy Babies Healthy Families In-depth Assessment Tool.

families decline participation, information and outreach services are extended for an appropriate period. (Three months is recommended. See p. 16 for details.)

If home visitation is not a suitable option, families are provided with information and referred to other community agencies, as appropriate.

## Standards

Home visitation programs use standardized screening and assessment tools.

Ideally, screening and assessment are initiated for parents-to-be or when a child is born.

Home visitation programs work with other community agencies to develop a **coordinated approach** to screening families. They may participate in community-based screening strategies or develop service protocols, as required.

To the extent possible, screening and assessment results are shared with families.

With the family's consent, screening and assessment information is shared with other community partners whenever possible.

## Home Visits

Home visits by trained staff are effective in improving parenting knowledge and skills and helping families access community-based resources.

Home visits take place in an accessible, non-threatening environment—usually the family's home or another acceptable location. This approach removes barriers, since participating families do not need to concern themselves with transportation or child care arrangements.

Home visits are scheduled according to family availability.

## **Voluntary Participation**

Participation in home visitation programs is voluntary.

The voluntary nature of home visitation programs supports the development of trusting relationships between program staff and families who receive home visits. Voluntary participation empowers families to set their own goals and make decisions in their own best interests. This increases the effectiveness of home visiting services.

*Voluntary participation is a home visiting best practice identified by the Healthy Families America program.*

Healthy Families America, "Critical Element #3" [online, cited May 17, 2004]  
(Prevent Child Abuse America, 2001)  
<[www.healthyfamiliesamerica.org/downloads/critical\\_elements\\_rationale.pdf](http://www.healthyfamiliesamerica.org/downloads/critical_elements_rationale.pdf)>

## **Early Intervention**

Research shows that effective home visiting starts early—prenatally or postpartum. Early intervention

- reaches families when they are most receptive to information
- ensures that children receive preventive medical care
- promotes parent–child bonding
- provides support at a potentially stressful time

*Early intervention is a recognized best practice. Most child abuse and neglect occurs in families with children under the age of two.*

Healthy Families America, "Critical Element #1" [online, cited May 17, 2004]  
(Prevent Child Abuse America, 2001)  
<[www.healthyfamiliesamerica.org/downloads/critical\\_elements\\_rationale.pdf](http://www.healthyfamiliesamerica.org/downloads/critical_elements_rationale.pdf)>

## **Intensive, Long-Term Delivery**

Effective home visitation programs must be intensive so that family needs can be met as they arise. To help families deal with new issues and changing circumstances, they must also be long term.

*Research shows that home visitation programs are most effective when weekly visits are provided for a period of at least two years.*

Healthy Families America, "Critical Element #4" [online, cited May 17, 2004]  
(Prevent Child Abuse America, 2001)  
<[www.healthyfamiliesamerica.org/downloads/critical\\_elements\\_rationale.pdf](http://www.healthyfamiliesamerica.org/downloads/critical_elements_rationale.pdf)>

## **Service Plans**

When a family agrees to participate in a home visitation program, family members and program staff work together to develop a service plan. The plan

- outlines the family's strengths, needs and resources, and its goals with respect to home visiting and parenting
- identifies strategies that can help the family achieve its goals and sets appropriate timelines
- identifies other community-based services that can help the family meet its needs
  - Home visitors make referrals and help families access community-based services, as required. This helps families strengthen their own support networks and become more self-reliant.
- establishes the schedule for home visits
- outlines the roles and responsibilities of each party

The family and the home visitor review the service plan regularly. They monitor progress and revise the plan as required.

**Standards**

Home visits focus on helping parents access community-based supports and on improving

- parent–child interaction
- parenting skills
- parents' knowledge of child development
- interpersonal relationships

Families and home visitors work together to develop a service plan that outlines both parties' goals and expectations.

The service plan is monitored every three months and revised as required.

A formal monitoring process is used to assess the family's progress and determine its ongoing suitability for the program. Well-defined criteria are used to determine what level of service a family needs and when services are no longer required.

Home visits take place weekly until such time as family needs change or the goals of the service plan have been accomplished.

## Administrative Procedures and Standards

### Program Design and Contracts

Alberta Children’s Services allocates home visitation program funding to regional Child and Family Services Authorities (CFSAs) which, in accordance with Ministry expectations, determine what type of home visitation program best meets the needs of their communities. The home visitation program in each region meets province-wide standards and guidelines while at the same time reflecting local priorities, resources and needs.

#### Standards

Home visitation programs are delivered through CFSA-administered service contracts with qualified agencies.

To facilitate province-wide program evaluation, monitoring and reporting, “Schedule A’s” of home visitation service delivery **contracts** signed on behalf of Alberta Children’s Services are **based on the program standards and requirements outlined in this document.**

Agencies contracted to deliver home visitation programs define the policies, procedures and criteria they will use to

- support home visitors
- initiate and terminate home visiting services
- establish service schedules that meet family needs
- develop and review service plans
- define the rights and responsibilities of program staff and participants

## Legal Requirements

Individuals, agencies and organizations that deliver home visitation programs must comply with the terms of their contracts with regional Child and Family Services Authorities and with related policies or agreements. They must also comply with relevant legislation and regulations, including

- the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act
- the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act (proclaimed in November 2004)
- other relevant legislation

## Confidentiality, Disclosure and Informed Consent

The collection, use and disclosure of personal information about families who participate in home visitation programs is governed by the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act.

### Standards

Home visitation programs comply with the legal requirements of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, particularly as it relates to

- the collection of personal information
- the use and disclosure of information about families who are program clients

Home visitation programs have written policies in place to deal with issues such as

- informed consent
- confidentiality
- the sharing of information, particularly with regard to sharing the results of screening and assessment and referring families to other agencies

All policies comply with existing legislation and with the requirements of the delivery agency's contract with a Child and Family Services Authority.

### **Duty to Report**

The Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act (proclaimed in November 2004) requires any person who believes a child is in need of protective services to report the matter to a Child and Family Services Authority or to a Delegated First Nations Authority. Under the act, anyone who fails to report suspected child abuse while having "reasonable and probable grounds to believe a child is in need of protective services" is guilty of an offence and liable to a fine of not more than \$2,000.

**The duty to report overrides any right of confidentiality or privilege** to families who participate in home visitation programs. If home visitors are not sure if a particular situation should be reported, they should discuss the situation with their local CFSA. *Discussions with supervisors or other agencies do not supersede the individual's duty to file a report.*

### **Standards**

Home visitation programs have written policy that outlines the requirements for reporting child abuse or other situations which place children in need of services and interventions as defined by the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act.

## Staffing and Supervision

### Home Visitors Qualifications

Staff who work as home visitors must have the skills and competencies needed to support families. They must understand and respect the cultural diversity of the communities they serve and be capable of developing trusting relationships with all types of families.

#### Standards

Home visitors have a human services diploma and/or appropriate life experiences and personal characteristics.

Home visitors are well trained so they can be effective in providing home visiting services. As a **minimum requirement**, service agencies provide their staff with training that covers the following topics:

- program goals, objectives and services
- the roles and responsibilities of home visitors
- maintaining professional boundaries between clients and home visitors
- early childhood growth and development
- family dynamics
- child abuse and neglect
- family violence and its impact on children
- using screening and assessment tools
- service planning
- appropriate intervention strategies
- working with hard-to-reach families

Home visitors have opportunities to participate in **ongoing training** to maintain their knowledge about home visiting best practices.

## Caseloads

The term caseload refers to the number of families served by each home visitor. Program caseloads must be small enough to allow home visitors to spend the time they need to develop strong, trusting relationships and be effective in helping families.

Caseloads are adjusted to reflect

- each family's particular needs
- the home visitor's skill and experiences
- the complexity of the family's situation
- the need for continuity
- travel time requirements
- case management requirements

*Small caseloads support an intensive home visiting schedule: research shows that weekly visits are most effective in helping families meet their needs.*

## Standards

Home visitors' caseloads range from 15 to 20 families.

- The lower range applies when weekly visits are required; the upper range applies when less-intensive visiting is appropriate. For example, weekly visits may not be needed once a family has achieved most of its service plan goals.

## Supervision and Safety

Home visitors have a difficult job: they often deal with families in crisis and work in stressful environments apart from their peers. Research shows that effective supervision can help home visitors deal with stress and avoid burn-out. Effective supervision can also encourage personal and professional development and ensure staff and program accountability.

Effective supervision\* must be

- regular
  - Blocks of uninterrupted time must be set aside for home visitors and their supervisors to discuss specific families and issues.
- reflective
  - Home visitors need time to develop problem-solving strategies and to think about their practice in a safe, supportive environment.
- collaborative
  - Home visitors and their supervisors must work together as partners whose mutual goal is helping and empowering families.

**In reflecting on a home visit, staff often address questions that examine the parent child relationship. Some examples follow.**

- Was the child present during the home visit?
- What did the parent and child do together?
- Did the parent complete the follow-up agreed to at the last visit?
- What concerns need to be addressed?

—From Bernstein, "Standing Firm...Reflective Supervision," *IMPrint: Newsletter of the Infant Mental Health Promotion Project* 35 (Winter 2002–2003): 7–11.

In addition to provide a supportive environment for staff, program supervisors are responsible for managing day-to-day operations. Specific tasks may include reviewing program participation figures, trends, caseloads and demographics.

---

\* Victor Bernstein, "Standing Firm Against the Forces of Risk: Supporting Home Visiting and Early Intervention Workers through Reflective Supervision," *IMPrint: Newsletter of the Infant Mental Health Promotion Project* 35 (Winter 2002–2003): 7–11, p. 7.

## Standards

Home visitation programs have written policies and procedures to protect the safety of staff. These policies and procedures must comply with the Occupational Health and Safety Act and related regulations. They must ensure that home visiting staff are

- trained
- competent to work alone
- have an effective means of contacting a person who can respond when they need assistance

Home visitation programs have written policies and procedures dealing with supervision.

Program supervisors have a post-secondary diploma or degree and appropriate work experience.

The ratio of workers to supervisors does not exceed one supervisor to six staff members.

Staff and supervisors engage in individualized, reflection-based supervision meetings at least twice a month.

## Monitoring, Record-Keeping and Reporting

Alberta Children's Services and its delivery partners are committed to maintaining the quality of home visitation programs in the province. Quality assurance serves a number of purposes:

- It ensures accountability for funding.
- It fosters learning and continual improvement in how communities and agencies work with families.
- It contributes to the body of knowledge about what works in early intervention programs.

The quality assurance system used for home visitation programs has two components:

- record-keeping and reporting
- program monitoring, which includes performance measurement and program evaluation

Alberta Children's Services, regional Child and Family Services Authorities and contracted service providers share responsibility for the implementation of this system.

## **Record-Keeping and Reporting**

**Agencies contracted to deliver home visitation programs are responsible for maintaining complete, accurate client records,** monitoring client progress and reporting performance results. This information allows the agency and the Ministry to report on performance, monitor quality and evaluate home visitation programs.

### **Standards**

Home visitation programs **collect and maintain complete, accurate information and file reports** in a timely manner, as specified in their contracts with Child and Family Services Authorities or as required by the Ministry.

Home visitation programs maintain written or electronic **records for each client**. Each client record includes

- contact information
- screening and assessment results
- referrals made to other community-based programs and the results of such referrals
- a copy of the family's service plan and progress notes
- consent forms
- notes about *all* the agency's attempts—successful or not—to provide home visiting services to the family

Home visiting service providers **monitor and report**

- client progress and outcomes
- performance results, as outlined in their contracts with Child and Family Services Authorities or as required by the Ministry
- client satisfaction (informally as well as through formal client satisfaction surveys)

Home visitation programs **protect the confidentiality** of client records in accordance with contractual and legislative requirements.

## Program Monitoring

Alberta Children's Services and regional Child and Family Services Authorities share responsibility for monitoring home visitation programs. Monitoring activities include

- ensuring that local practices are consistent with provincial policies and standards
- identifying and addressing issues and concerns with regard to provincial policies and standards
- collecting the information needed to make ongoing program adjustments
- reviewing regional and provincial performance indicators

There are two components to program monitoring: performance measurement and program evaluation.

**Performance measurement** is an ongoing process tied to overall contract management. It compares the funds invested in a program (inputs) to short-term program results (outputs). This information helps Alberta Children's Services and contracted service providers assess the impact of the program and identify areas for improvement.

**Program evaluation** is a systematic process of collecting, analyzing and interpreting information about the implementation, effectiveness and efficiency of

a program. Evaluation is closely linked to performance measurement, although it is typically conducted periodically rather than as an ongoing function of an organization. Data collected through performance measurement provides the basis for evaluations to assess the impact and success of a program.

Program evaluation is conducted at the program level, regionally and provincially:

- At the program level, service providers allocate resources to evaluate their home visitation programs.
- At the regional level, evaluations are conducted by home visiting service providers in partnership with other service providers or with the region's Child and Family Services Authority.
- At the provincial level, program evaluations are carried out in partnership with Child and Family Services Authorities.

### **Standards**

Agencies that deliver home visitation programs evaluate their programs at regular intervals.

Home visitation programs designate a portion of their program budget for monitoring and evaluation.

- Home visitation programs that model best practices assign 5% to 10% of their annual budgets for this purpose.

Program evaluation is conducted in partnership with Child and Family Services Authorities or other agencies, as appropriate.

## Roles and Responsibilities

Successful home visitation programs depend on the cooperation of many partners, each of whom plays a specific role. The following chapter summarizes the roles and responsibilities of each partner. These roles will continue to evolve as home visitation programs develop and grow.

### Alberta Children's Services

Under Alberta law, the provincial government is accountable for services provided for the safety, security and well-being of children and families.

Alberta's Ministry of Children's Services is responsible for

- setting provincial objectives and strategic direction for the provision of child and family services
- establishing provincial policies and standards
- monitoring and assessing how Child and Family Services Authorities carry out their responsibilities
- allocating funding and other resources
- ensuring reasonable access, comprehensiveness and portability across regions

## **Child and Family Services Authorities**

Subject to the Child and Family Services Act and its associated regulations, regional Child and Family Services Authorities act on behalf of the Minister of Children's Services. CFSAs are responsible for

- promoting the safety, security and well-being of children, families and other members of the community
- setting regional objectives and strategic direction for the provision of child and family services
- establishing regional policies, including policies with regard to home visitation programs
- ensuring that policies and standards are followed
- determining service priorities and allocating resources accordingly
- planning and managing the provision of child and family services
- monitoring and assessing the provision of child and family services
- conducting ongoing assessments of social and other needs in their region
- working with other authorities, the government and other public and private bodies to coordinate the provision of child and family services
- ensuring reasonable access to quality child and family services

## Home Visiting Service Providers

Agencies that provide home visitation programs under contract to Alberta's Child and Family Services Authorities

- carry out the terms and conditions of their contracts
- provide programs that comply with Alberta Children's Services' guidelines and policies
- ensure their programs are based on current best practices and evidence-based research
- develop and nurture community partnerships; negotiate service protocols, as required
- recruit, train and supervise program staff
- maintain program records
- monitor and report program progress and results
- evaluate performance using formal and informal measures of client satisfaction and other appropriate methods
- develop an evaluation process and allocate appropriate funding for monitoring and evaluation
- comply with legislative requirements

## Home Visitors

Home visitors are responsible for

- providing information and delivering high-quality services to parents and children who are clients of the program
- establishing trust
- making referrals
- working with families to develop service plans
- promoting positive parent–child relationships

## Families Who Participate in Home Visitation Programs

Families are responsible for

- working with home visitors to develop service plans
- working toward goals identified in their service plans

## Program Contacts

Home visitation programs funded by Alberta Children's Services are delivered by the province's regional Child and Family Services Authorities (CFSAs) through contracts with qualified service providers.

### Child and Family Services Authorities (Main Offices)

#### Region 1 – Southwest Alberta

#107, 3305 – 18 Avenue North  
Lethbridge, Alberta T1H 5S1  
Phone: (403) 381-5543  
Fax: (403) 381-5608

#### Region 2 – Southeast Alberta

#101, 346 – 3 Street SE  
Medicine Hat, Alberta T1A 0G7  
Phone: (403) 529-3753  
Fax: (403) 528-5244

#### Region 3 – Calgary and Area

2nd Floor, 1011 – 6 Avenue SW  
Calgary, Alberta T2P 0W1  
Phone: (403) 297-8080  
Fax: (403) 297-7214

#### Region 4 – Central Alberta

3rd Floor, Bishop Place  
4826 Ross Street  
Red Deer, Alberta T4N 1X4  
Phone: (403) 341-8642  
Fax: (403) 341-8654

#### Region 5 – East Central Alberta

Box 300, 4811 – 49 Avenue  
Killam, Alberta T0B 2L0  
Phone: (780) 385-7160  
Fax: (780) 385-7163

**Region 6 – Edmonton and Area**

7th Floor, Oxbridge Place  
9820 – 106 Street  
Edmonton, Alberta T5K 2J6  
Phone: (780) 427-2250  
Fax: (780) 422-6864

**Region 7 – North Central Alberta**

2nd Floor, Administration Building  
5143 – 50 Street  
Barrhead, Alberta T7N 1A6  
Phone: (780) 305-2440  
Fax: (780) 305-2444

**Region 8 – Northwest Alberta**

3001, 10320 – 99 Street  
Grande Prairie, Alberta T8V 6J4  
Phone: (780) 538-5122  
Fax: (780) 538-5137

**Region 9 – Northeast Alberta**

4th Floor, Provincial Building  
9915 Franklin Avenue  
Fort McMurray, Alberta T9H 2K4  
Phone: (780) 743-7461  
Fax: (780) 743-7474

**Region 10 – Métis Settlements**

Room 412, Mayfield Business Centre  
10525 – 170 Street  
Edmonton, Alberta T5P 4W2  
Phone: (780) 427-1033  
Fax: (780) 415-0177

## Resources

### **Canadian Association of Family Resource Programs**

<[www.frp.ca](http://www.frp.ca)>

The Canadian Association of Family Resource Programs (FRP Canada) is dedicated to the advancement of social policy, research, resource development and training for organizations and individuals who enhance the capacity of families to raise their children.

FRP Canada's definition of family support programs is widely accepted, as are its 12 guiding principles of family support.

### **Council on Accreditation (COA)**

<[www.coanet.org](http://www.coanet.org)>

The Council on Accreditation (COA) is an international not-for-profit organization that develops and promotes accreditation standards for both private and public child and family services agencies. In 2001 COA worked toward accrediting more than 1,400 organizations serving more than 6 million individuals and families in Canada and the United States.

### **Healthy Babies, Healthy Children**

<[www.children.gov.on.ca/CS/en/programs/Healthy/default.htm](http://www.children.gov.on.ca/CS/en/programs/Healthy/default.htm)>

Home visiting is an important component of this Government of Ontario program, which was launched by the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care and the Ministry of Community, Family and Children's Services in 1998.

### **Healthy Families America**

<[www.healthyfamiliesamerica.org](http://www.healthyfamiliesamerica.org)>

The Healthy Families America program provides home visiting services and referrals "to help expectant and new parents get their children off to a healthy start." The program's 12 critical elements were defined as a result of more than 20 years of research. A list of these elements can be downloaded at <[www.healthyfamiliesamerica.org/downloads/critical\\_elements\\_rationale.pdf](http://www.healthyfamiliesamerica.org/downloads/critical_elements_rationale.pdf)>.

**Infant Mental Health Promotion Project (IMP)**

<[www/sickkids.ca/imp](http://www/sickkids.ca/imp)>

Established at Toronto's Hospital for Sick Children in 1988, the Infant Mental Health Promotion Project (IMP) is a coalition of professionals from agencies concerned with infants and their families. The project newsletter, *IMP*rint, includes articles, case studies and literature reviews on a broad range of topics, including home visiting.

**Invest in Kids Foundation**

<[www.investinkids.ca](http://www.investinkids.ca)>

Invest in Kids is a national not-for-profit organization whose goal is to help families make the most of their children's first five years. The Invest in Kids website contains a wealth of information for parents and family support service providers, including the complete report on the foundation's 1999 survey of Canadian parents.

**Ontario Children's Secretariat**

<[www.childsec.gov.on.ca](http://www.childsec.gov.on.ca)>

The secretariat funded Margaret Norrie McCain and J. Fraser Mustard's landmark study, *Reversing the Real Brain Drain: Early Years Study Final Report* (April 1999).

The full report is available as a PDF file which can be downloaded from the World Bank website:

<[www.worldbank.org/children/Early%20Years%20Study%20English.pdf](http://www.worldbank.org/children/Early%20Years%20Study%20English.pdf)>

**Founders' Network of the Canadian Institute for Advanced Research (CIAR)**

<[wwwFOUNDERS.NET](http://wwwFOUNDERS.NET)>

The Founders' Network funded Margaret Norrie McCain and J. Fraser Mustard's *The Early Years Study Three Years Later*—a report on the Government of Ontario's response to recommendations made in the 1999 *Early Years Study*.

## Selected Bibliography

Alberta Children's Services. "Provincial Home Visitation Initiative: Guidelines for Proposals." Edmonton: Alberta Children's Services, December 21, 2000.

Bernstein, Victor. "Standing Firm Against the Forces of Risk: Supporting Home Visiting and Early Intervention Workers through Reflective Supervision." *IMPrint: Newsletter of the Infant Mental Health Project* 35 (Winter 2002–2003): 7–11.

Council on Accreditation for Children and Family Services, Inc. *Home Visitor Services Council on Accreditation*. Council on Accreditation for Children and Family Services, Inc., 2001.

Gomby, Deanna S., Patti L. Culross and Richard E. Behrman. "Home Visiting: Recent Program Evaluations—Analysis and Recommendations." *The Future of Children* 9, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 1999): 4–26.

Government of Ontario (Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care and Ministry of Community, Family and Children's Services). *Healthy Babies Healthy Children: Consolidated Guidelines*. Government of Ontario, October 2003.

Healthy Families America. "Critical Elements" [for successful home visiting programs] [online]. Prevent Child Abuse America, 2001. [Cited May 17, 2004.] <[www.healthyfamiliesamerica.org/downloads/critical\\_elements\\_rationale.pdf](http://www.healthyfamiliesamerica.org/downloads/critical_elements_rationale.pdf)>.



