

A Thriving Wage for Home Visitors is Good for Families, Employers, and Staff

Early childhood workers, mostly women—and often women of color—have historically been underpaid and undervalued. This is no exception in the field of home visiting, where home visiting program leaders are also facing increased challenges with home visitor recruitment and retention.

Parents as Teachers National Center (PATNC) believes that home visitors must be compensated competitively if we are to build sustainable, high-quality programs that make a real difference in the lives of families and young children.

This brief is intended to support program staff and funders in their efforts to bolster support of the home visiting workforce, particularly as they work to ensure that home visitors themselves are compensated with wages that allow them to thrive and develop the deep relationships with families that are necessary for meaningful impact.

Background

A recent Urban Institute study examining the career trajectories of home visitors found that home visitors without supervisory duties earned about \$36,600 a year if working 40 hours per week, year-round.¹ While the cost of living varies among localities across the country, this wage makes it difficult to support a family and to attract workers in an increasingly competitive marketplace.

In "Work-Related Stressors Among Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) Home Visitors: A Qualitative Study," it was discovered that, although many home visitors find great meaning and satisfaction from their work, MIECHV awardees face substantial challenges in workforce recruitment and retention. This issue is especially pronounced in rural areas where the applicant pool is smaller. Staff have cited

low compensation, among other items, as a key reason for dissatisfaction with their position.²

This information underscores several of many benefits to paying thriving, competitive wages to home visitors. Most importantly, the families served by home visiting benefit the most from the deep relationships that are possible when home visitors are well supported and enjoy a long tenure with their employer.

Benefits to employers

Offering competitive wages helps reduce staff turnover. In the evidence-based home visiting field, staff turnover can be especially costly given the significant amount of training and professional development required for home visitors to maintain fidelity to the model and provide high-quality services to families. It is also highly detrimental in a program whose success depends on the trusting

¹ Heather Sandstrom, Derek Genua, Carina Lou, and Sarah Benatar, *Home Visiting Career Trajectories: Snapshot of Home Visitors' Qualifications, Job Experiences, and Career Pathways*, OPRE Report #2020-59 (Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2020).

² Paige J. Alitz, Shana Geary, Pamela C. Birriel, Takudzwa Sayi, Rema Ramakrishnan, Omotola Balogun, Alison Salloum, and Jennifer T. Marshall, "Work-Related Stressors Among Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) Home Visitors: A Qualitative Study," *Maternal and Child Health Journal* 22, Suppl 1 (2018): 62-69, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10995-018-2536-8>.

relationships that are built with families. Losing a trained home visitor costs the employer both money and time, and families often go unserved while new home visitors are hired and trained. Also, there are costs associated with recruitment and onboarding new home visitors (e.g., advertising job listings, screening and interviewing candidates, training, orientation), and the loss of institutional knowledge and experience when an experienced home visitor leaves.

Paying home visiting staff a competitive, thriving wage can lead to a more motivated, loyal, and productive workforce. Employers who have staff with higher morale tend to have a positive workplace atmosphere. Better pay can also help enhance recruitment efforts because offering a competitive wage makes an organization more attractive to potential home visitors. Employees who feel that they are fairly compensated are more likely to be loyal to their employer and may have a stronger commitment to the organization's mission and goals.

There are also reputational considerations for employers. Paying a living wage is a sign of a socially responsible and ethical organization,

especially in the social service sector. This enhances the organization's reputation in the community, including with philanthropists, ultimately contributing to the overall impact and fundability of the organization.

Benefits to home visiting staff

When home visitors are paid a wage that allows them to meet their basic needs and have some discretionary income, they are likely to feel more valued and motivated. This can lead to higher job satisfaction and increased productivity. A recent study of the Parents as Teachers workforce³ found that compensation can also be a key driver of home visitor well-being—it was found that higher salary is significantly related to the ability to maintain a work-life balance for home visitors.

Further, home visitors who are financially stressed often experience health issues or personal problems that can then lead to absence, which negatively impacts the employer. When paid a living wage, home visitors are more likely to be physically and mentally healthy, leading to fewer missed workdays. When home visitors are not preoccupied with financial stress, they are more able to be focused on their work and

engage in reflective practice. “The need for home visitors to be nonjudgmental, objective, and reflective is also very important. It is through the use of such abilities that home visitors are able to establish a productive working relationship with families.”⁴

Benefits to families

Providing the highest quality of service to families is at the center of everything parent educators and their employers do; employers should consider how paying parent educators a competitive wage will have a positive impact on the families they serve. One consideration to make is the impact on relationships with families—recruiting and retaining high-quality home visiting staff helps to provide continuity of care to families. Relationships matter, and strong relationships between parent educators and the families served are a backbone to the outcomes achieved. It can be difficult to rebuild a strong relationship with a family when a parent educator leaves for a higher-paying job; some families may even choose to end services altogether.

³ Jennifer Henk, Tatiana Gochez-Kerr, and Michael Sopher, "Exploring Characteristics of the Parents as Teachers Workforce" (presentation, Parents as Teachers International Conference, New Orleans, LA, USA, October 16–19, 2023).

⁴ Barbara Wasik and Donna Bryant, *Home Visiting: Procedures for Helping Families* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2001), <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781452225616>.

A note on full-time vs. part-time

The status of home visitors working part-time versus full-time varies widely across organizations and programs. Naturally, parent educators who work full-time hours earn more compensation. There are, however, home visitors who prefer the flexibility of part-time hours even if the total wages are lower. Nevertheless, comprehensive benefits, including health care, paid leave, and retirement, should be offered by employers for full-time and part-time home visitors. Offering such benefits is essential for staff well-being and economic stability just as they are for the families served. The Parents as Teachers Affiliate Implementation Manual states that a key element of success for affiliates is “[c]ompensation that recognizes the essential nature of home visiting and skill level/expertise of home visitors and their supervisors. PATNC does not support the compensation model of payment by visit.”

Conclusion and call to action

While each organization must consider its own unique context, providing a thriving wage for home visitors yields many benefits. It improves the quality and stability of the parent educator workforce, therefore also increasing the quality of the services provided and ensuring the crucial relationships built with families served. Parents as Teachers firmly supports the goal that all home visiting staff receive a thriving wage that includes comprehensive benefits. While the 2022 reauthorization of the Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) Program provides an exciting opportunity to increase the investment in home visiting workforce support, other funding sources are also required to meet the growing need.

We call on funders who are invested in early care and education to think critically about workforce development in this sector. Funders must evaluate what they are paying home visiting programs and

how much is allocated to wages—does program funding reflect the work, skill, training, time, and stress associated with the job? A cost model, such as that recently completed by Start Early⁵, is a useful tool that funders could consult and replicate within their context to estimate the adequate cost of providing voluntary, accessible, comprehensive home visiting services.

Finally, although compensation is significant, it is only one piece of the home visiting workforce puzzle. As home visiting expert Janelle Weldin-Frisch writes, “To retain this critical workforce, we need to advocate for higher salaries that match the expertise that home visitors bring to their work with families, nurture existing job benefits (e.g., partnership and support of peers; ongoing on-the-job professional development), and support opportunities for advancement.”⁶ A competitive, thriving wage is required to achieve a sustainable, high-quality workforce for home visitors and other early childhood professionals.

⁵ Karen Goldfarb, *Home Visiting Cost Model* (Start Early, June 2022), <https://oecd.illinois.gov/content/dam/soi/en/web/oecd/documents/start-early-miechv-cost-model-08-30-22.pdf>.

⁶ Janelle Weldin-Frisch, "Going Beyond Workforce Recruitment and Retention in Home Visiting." *Start Early* (blog). 2023. <https://www.startearly.org/post/going-beyond-workforce-recruitment-and-retention-in-home-visiting/#:~:text=To%20retain%20this%20critical%20workforce,and%20support%20opportunities%20for%20advancement>.