

To *Your* HEALTH *Fresno County*

Bringing you public health issues and ways to improve personal, family, neighborhood and community health



Home Visitation: An Essential Driver of Health and Well-being

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I regularly tell new public health department employees (during their orientation) a story about the heartbreaking [difference in health and wellness outcomes](#) that can result between two individuals of identical genetic makeup and born into exactly the same family dynamic. The only difference between these two individuals is the availability of healthful circumstances and resources where they grow up.

At the end of this horrific story on the effects of inequity and disparity in life resources, it becomes obvious that the divergence in the respective paths toward health and wellness is most affected by the earliest disparities, and either compounded by subsequent further disparity or stabilized (possibly even improved) by addressing subsequent disparity.

I end the story by making the point that along the life course, if just a few, or just a couple, or maybe even just one negative circumstance can be averted early enough the divergent path toward poor health can be made considerably more convergent with the path toward wellness.

Within the Fresno County Department of Public Health, there exists a group of programs, which offer just such interventions. “Home visiting programs have been used since the 1880’s to deliver medical, public health, and social services to women, children, and families in their homes.”¹

The possibility exists for all of the disparities negatively impacting the disadvantaged infant in our story to be addressed by a public health nurse making regular visits to the pregnant mother’s and/or infant’s home. To follow the story line:

- Breast feeding is encouraged, and thus adopted, leading to significantly fewer childhood infections
- Reading, talking, and singing to the infant is encouraged and enhanced leading to significant expansion of intellectual development

- Possible exposure to lead is recognized and prevented **before** its effects of damage to intellect and behavior patterns occur
- Regular visits to a health care provider for routine developmental checks and optimal preventive medical interventions are encouraged and facilitated leading to significantly improved childhood health
- Information on accessing and preparing healthful food and acquiring access to safe, quality physical activity opportunities (in areas where both are sparse) is offered leading to decreased risk of future chronic disease
- Quality preschool experience is encouraged and facilitated resulting in further enhanced intellectual development and readiness for school entry

Each of these interventions leads to improved outcomes in the future health and wellness of infants born into financial and educational disadvantage. Added to these are the wellness advantages to the mother of information on family planning, assistance with the pursuit of further education, and encouragement of, and assistance with employment and career goals.

Financial and educational disadvantage is often compounded by exposure to abuse, neglect, violence, or other household dysfunction during childhood. This acts to further significantly undermine the child's future health and wellness, and in fact, insures that poor outcomes are sustained and exacerbated across generations.

In such circumstances the role of the home visitor is absolutely critical in insuring that a child's protective networks are firmly in place in order to assure the resilience that can counteract the devastating effects of [adverse childhood experiences \(ACE's\)](#).

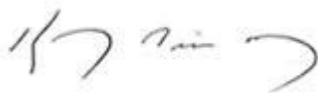
Support, education, linkages, all the time honored and evidence-based techniques of home visitation are essential to the health of our community.

Referrals should be pursued for all pregnant women, or at risk mothers with young children, and can be made to the following programs at FCDPH:

- High Risk Infant Program
- Nurse Liaison Program
- Nurse-Family Partnership
- Babies First Home Visitation
- Black Infant Health

To quote a colleague at the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, "Imagine if home visits were expected in the same way that we can expect clean water and electricity to reach homes in all neighborhoods. Our culture considers these basic utilities essential drivers of health and well-being, and rightfully so! Home visits should be no different."²

Here's to your health!



Dr. Ken Bird, Fresno County Health Officer
ToYourHealth@co.fresno.ca.us

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Citations

1. <http://www.astho.org/Policy-and-Position-Statements/Position-Statement-on-State-Home-Visiting-Programs/>
2. <https://www.rwjf.org/en/culture-of-health/2016/11/home-visits-make-them-universal.html>