

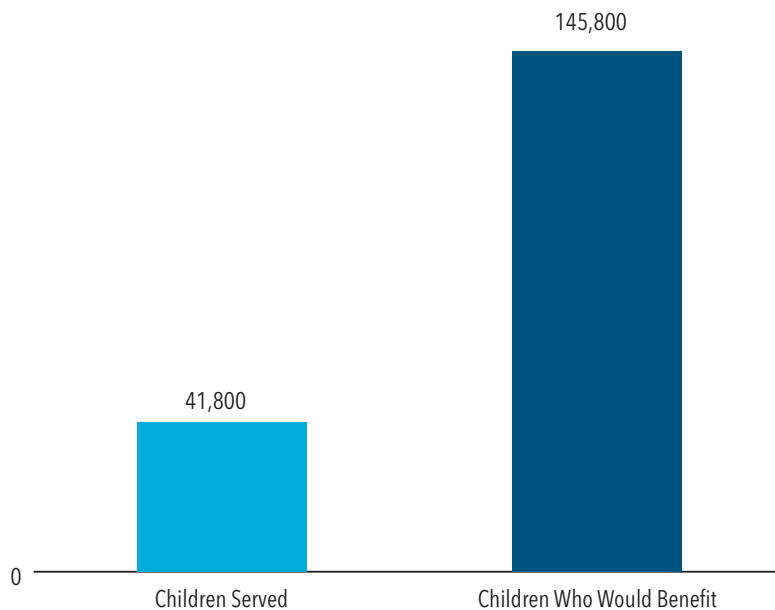


## Even Before COVID-19, Few Children Received Beneficial Home Visiting Services

FEBRUARY 2021 | BY ESI HUTCHFUL

As families across California struggle with COVID-19, it is increasingly critical that children have the resources they need at birth to lay the foundation for lifelong well-being.<sup>1</sup> Assets such as family, health, and financial resources are strongly associated with child health and resilience, and with fewer harmful experiences such as involvement in the child welfare system.<sup>2</sup> When children are exposed to adverse experiences and toxic stress, early intervention tools like evidence-based home visiting can reduce or prevent negative outcomes.<sup>3</sup> Home visitors, who are often social workers or nurses, provide parenting support and other assistance that can enhance child and maternal health and improve child development.

### Even Before COVID-19, Fewer Children in California Received Home Visiting Services than Would Most Likely Benefit



Note: Estimated likely beneficiaries defined as children ages 0 to 2 born with 6 or fewer California Strong Start assets. Service levels are for state fiscal year 2018-19. It is not possible to ascertain the asset scores of children receiving services. Analysis includes partial-year data for the CalWORKs Home Visiting Program. Source: Budget Center analysis of data from First 5 California, the California Department of Public Health, the California Department of Social Services, and the California Strong Start Index.

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However, even before the COVID-19 crisis, too few California children were receiving home visiting support. In the 2018-19 state fiscal year, 41,800 children received federally and locally funded evidence-based or evidence-informed home visits, compared to the estimated 145,800 children ages 0 to 2 who would most likely benefit from such services.<sup>4</sup>

Now, with families facing significant long-term hardship due to the pandemic and recession, home visitors continue to provide critical support by connecting families to supportive services.<sup>5</sup> State policymakers should provide funding to expand home visiting to more families and also increase support for televisits with current clients, many of whom have become less accessible to home visitors.<sup>6</sup> Additionally, state policymakers should also support home visitors, who are also facing increased challenges related to COVID-19 and need additional mental health support as they serve families.<sup>7</sup>



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*Support for this Fact Sheet was provided by First 5 California.*

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<sup>1</sup> Prenatal-to-3 Policy Impact Center, *Why Do We Focus on the Prenatal-to-3 Age Period? Understanding the Importance of the Earliest Years* (LBJ School of Public Affairs, The University of Texas at Austin: January 2021): 2, [https://pn3policy.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/PN3PolicyImpactCenter\\_B001202101\\_WhyFocusonPN3.pdf](https://pn3policy.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/PN3PolicyImpactCenter_B001202101_WhyFocusonPN3.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> Regan Foust et al., *California Strong Start Index Documentation* (USC Suzanne Dworak-Peck School of Social Work Children's Data Network, January 14, 2020): 3-4, <https://www.datanetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/CASSi-FINAL-1-14-2020.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> US Department of Health and Human Services, *The Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting Program: Partnering With Parents to Help Children Succeed* (April 2020), <https://mchb.hrsa.gov/sites/default/files/mchb/MaternalChildHealthInitiatives/HomeVisiting/pdf/programbrief.pdf>.

<sup>4</sup> Data on service levels were provided by First 5 California, the California Department of Public Health (CDPH), and the California Department of Social Services (CDSS). The CDSS CalWORKs Home Visiting Program (HVP) began January 2019, with few counties offering services prior to April 2019. Consequently, the HVP caseload data for 2018-19 represents partial-year figures and caseload figures are subject to change. HVP data only indicate if children received a first visit. The estimated number of potential beneficiaries is based on statewide birth data from CDPH and from data provided by Emily Putnam-Hornstein and Regan Foust (USC Suzanne Dworak-Peck School of Social Work Children's Data Network).

<sup>5</sup> Jennifer Marshall et al., "Statewide Implementation of Virtual Perinatal Home Visiting During COVID-19," *Maternal and Child Health Journal* 24, no. 10 (October 2020): 1224-1230, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10995-020-02982-8>.

<sup>6</sup> Preliminary results of a statewide Child Trends survey of the First 5 California home visiting workforce collected as of September 15, 2020. Danielle Hegseth, email message to author, November 19, 2020.

<sup>7</sup> Danielle Hegseth, email message to author, November 19, 2020.