

Receiving Concrete Support Linked to Home Visiting Program Engagement

June 2024

Home visiting programs are an effective resource states can offer to expectant and new parents with young children to promote nurturing and responsive parent-child relationships and healthy home environments. A variety of home visiting program models exist to serve families' varying needs, and home visiting services are typically offered through a trained professional (e.g., nurse or social worker) or paraprofessional, depending on the program model.

In Texas, the Prevention and Early Intervention (PEI) division of the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services funds community organizations (grantees) to implement evidence-based home visiting models that promote family self-sufficiency, create supportive communities, and support positive child health and development outcomes.¹ Broadly, PEI's home visiting grantees serve families with characteristics—such as single parenthood, joblessness, or low incomes—that put children at a greater risk of experiencing economic insecurity.^{2,3}

In response to the unprecedented stress and economic hardship families experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic, PEI allocated American Rescue Plan Act funds to pair traditional home visiting services with emergency concrete support, including in-kind and monetary assistance, to help families meet their basic needs. In-kind concrete support included diapers, food, baby formula, and other household essentials. Monetary concrete support included gift cards and bill payment assistance.

Pairing traditional home visiting services with concrete support can ease a family's financial strain while also promoting better program involvement and engagement by incentivizing families to stay in the program and reducing stress and other barriers to participation.

To understand the value of providing concrete support within a home visiting program, the Prenatal-to-3 Policy Impact Center at Vanderbilt University surveyed 602 families that participated in PEI-funded home visiting services in Texas and also analyzed program administrative data for 9,261 Texas home visiting families. The findings show that pairing concrete support to meet basic needs with core home visiting services may increase the benefits of the home visiting program for families served.

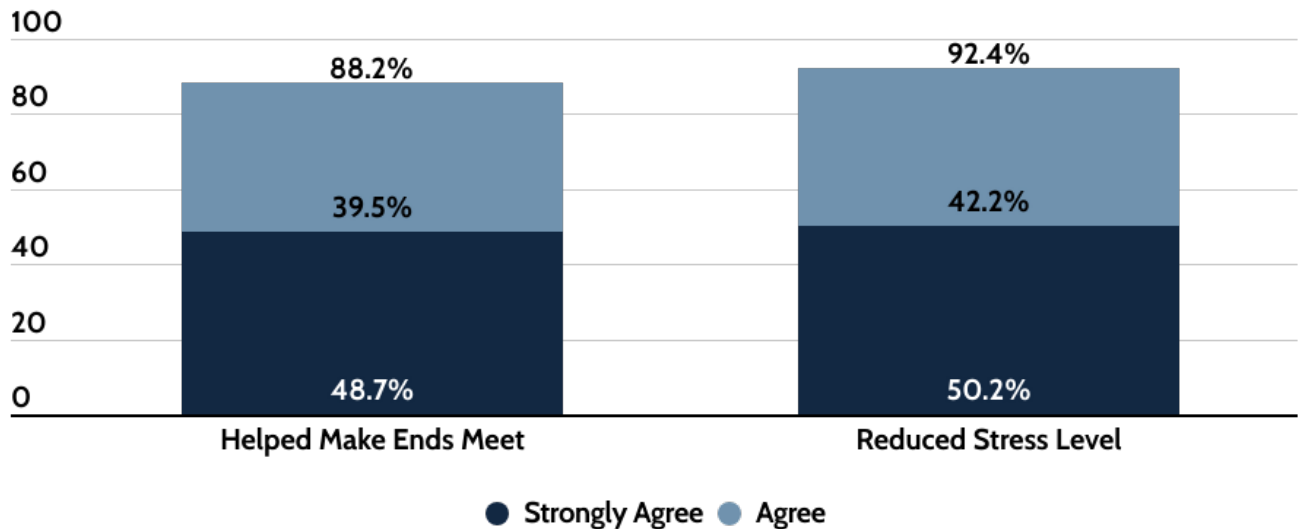
Concrete support helped families meet basic needs and reduced family stress.

Almost all families that received concrete support strongly agreed or agreed that these supports helped them to make ends meet (89%) and helped to reduce their family's stress levels (93%; see Figure 1). The concrete support provided to families ranged in monetary value but could include up to \$250 worth of support to each family. These findings show that even relatively small levels of support, such as a \$25 grocery gift card or a pack of diapers, can make a difference in the eyes of the families that receive them.

"We are behind on all bills such as electricity, gas, and internet...[We are] just having trouble getting caught up; once you get behind, it's like quicksand."

- Home Visiting Parent

Figure 1. The Value of Concrete Support to Home Visiting Families



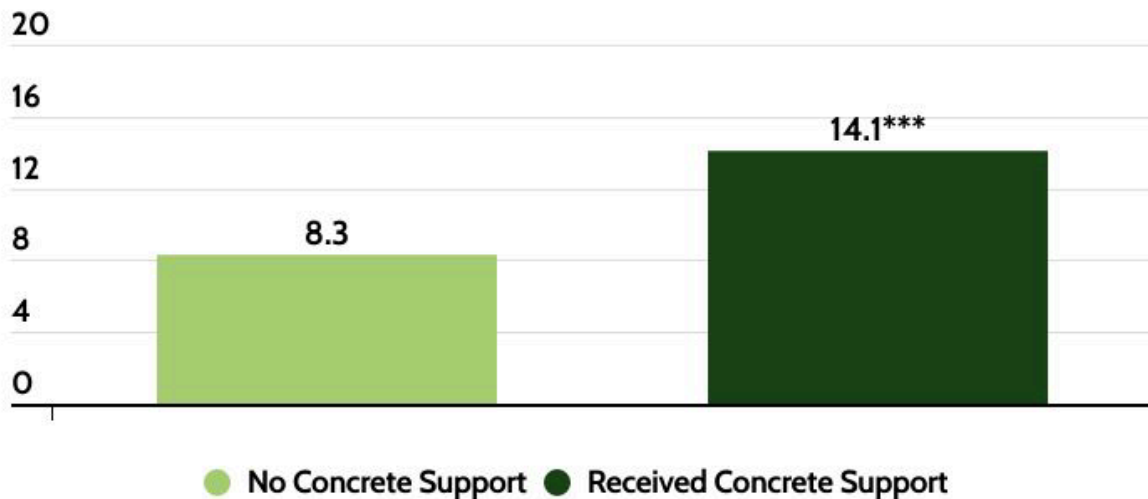
Source: The Family Experience Survey, the Prenatal-to-3 Policy Impact Center. November 2022. Note: Estimates represent the proportion of families that reported receiving basic needs support (n=436).

Receipt of concrete support is associated with longer program participation.

The results also show that receipt of concrete support is associated with an average of 6 additional months of program participation for families (see Figure 2). Specifically, families that received concrete support stayed an average of 14 months in their home visiting program, compared to an average of 8 months among families that did not receive concrete support.

Families facing economic insecurity often face stressors that can make it challenging for them to participate in parenting programs such as home visiting. Therefore, by helping families meet their basic needs, concrete support may facilitate longer program participation by incentivizing families to stay in the program and addressing barriers to participation.

Figure 2. Number of Months of Home Visiting Participation by Receipt of Concrete Support



Source: PEIRS administrative data, the Prenatal-to-3 Policy Impact Center, 2023. Notes: Logistic regression models were used to examine the association between months of program participation and receipt of concrete support. Models control for family, caregiver, and enrollment characteristics.

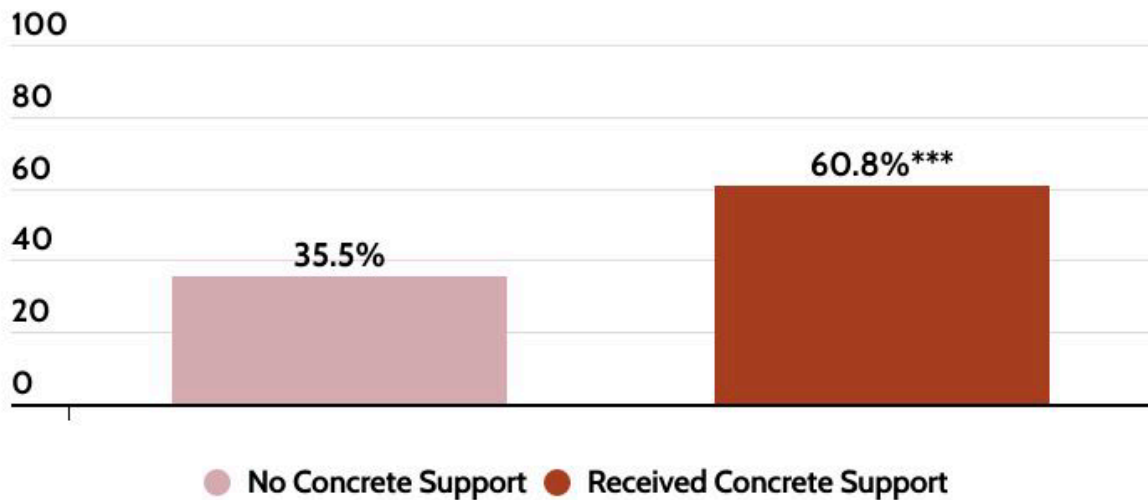
"The program has helped us out in a way I couldn't be more thankful for. Thankfully we are also employed and able to buy what we need, [but] sometimes times are tough and we will be tight on money, and the program has helped us."

- Home Visiting Parent

Receipt of concrete support is associated with better program outcomes.

Receiving concrete support is also associated with better program outcomes. Approximately two-thirds (61%) of families that received concrete support fully met the objectives of their home visiting program model (see Figure 3), whereas just over one-third (36%) of those who did not receive concrete support fully met program objectives.

Figure 3. Percent of Families that Fully Met Program Objectives by Receipt of Concrete Support



Source: PEIRS administrative data, the Prenatal-to-3 Policy Impact Center, 2023. Notes: Logistic regression models were used to examine the association between meeting program objectives and receipt of concrete support. Models control for family, caregiver, and enrollment characteristics.

Although the findings show that providing concrete support alongside traditional home visiting services is associated with longer participation and better program outcomes, the current analysis cannot clearly determine the direction of the association. It is possible that concrete support facilitates better program engagement by reducing stressors on the family or by building good will for the program. But it is also possible that longer program participation provides more opportunities for families to receive concrete support from their home visiting program; therefore, it is possible that the support itself that is not driving stronger program engagement, but rather that the concrete support is a consequence of being more engaged with the program.

Conclusion

Home visiting programs primarily serve families with low incomes, including many families living in poverty. Such economic strain and the resulting stress may make it difficult for families to prioritize participation in home visiting programs, even when they want to. Rigorous evidence demonstrates that home visiting programs can positively impact parent and child outcomes; however, when families leave programs early or cannot fully participate, program effectiveness may be limited.

We find that concrete support helps families meet their basic needs and reduces family stress. Further, we find that concrete support is associated with better program engagement, though more research is needed to identify a causal link between the two. As states and community organizations work to improve child and family outcomes, pairing home visiting with concrete support for families may maximize the impact of the home visiting services.

References

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Recommended Citation

Osborne, C., Navarro, M., & Huffman, J. (2024). *Receiving Concrete Support Linked to Home Visiting Program Engagement*. Prenatal-to-3 Policy Impact Center. <https://pn3policy.org>.