

To: Ways and Means Human Services Subcommittee Members
From: Elena Rivera, Health Policy & Program Advisor at the Children's Institute
Date: March 8th, 2017
Re: Protecting our state investment in public health nurse home visiting

Co-Chairs Senator Steiner Hayward and Representative Rayfield, and members of the committee:

My name is Elena Rivera, and I am the Health Policy & Program Advisor for the Children's Institute. Children's Institute's mission is to ensure every child in Oregon is prepared for school and life. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of protecting our state investment in public health nurse home visiting. Children's Institute champions early investments in kids and families from prenatal care to age eight to boost education and health outcomes for all of Oregon's children.

The importance of public health nurse home visiting

We all know that children experience their most profound cognitive, physical, social, and emotional growth in the first few years of life. By the time children reach their third birthday, their brains are 80 percent developed. The quality of children's early experiences during this crucial period of growth sets the foundation for all future learning and lifelong health. When young children live in stable and healthy environments and have nurturing caregivers, they are more likely to be healthy and developmentally on-track, which sets them on a trajectory of success.

Public health nurse home visiting is a critical health promotion intervention that serves families starting with prenatal care up through the first few years of life. Programs match skilled public health nurses with families facing risk for poor outcomes to offer parents resources, information, and tools that strengthen parent-child relationships, ensure children are getting the health care they need, and promote early learning. Public health nurse home visiting intervenes early to prevent and reduce adverse childhood experiences that could have lifelong impacts on health outcomes, thereby saving the state millions in costly interventions later down the road and promoting a healthy and productive workforce.^{i, ii}

Public health nurse home visiting programs are a critical piece of Oregon's early childhood system

The Oregon Health Authority's Public Health Division serves over 15,000 vulnerable children, families, and youth with special health needs each biennium through four voluntary nurse home visiting programs.

There has been incredible progress and this work is still underway to ensure home visiting services provided by the Oregon Health Authority are coordinated and aligned with the home visiting programs provided through the Early Learning Division. Efforts to coordinate enrollment and referrals, track shared outcomes, and improve professional development opportunities for all home visitors demonstrates a clear commitment by the state to ensure our evolving comprehensive early childhood system truly works for children and families.

Protect our state investment in Babies First! nurse home visiting

Our state currently invests \$1.5 million each biennium in the Babies First! nurse home visiting program. This investment, combined with a match by local public health authorities, allows Oregon to draw down \$12 million of Medicaid funding. In addition, Oregon's newly approved Medicaid waiver will allow Babies First! to provide more prenatal care to mothers, reaching families earlier with prevention and health promotion services.

The outcomes of public health nurse home visiting speak for themselves. Babies First! increases the rate of child immunizations, well-child visits, and dental visits – each stated priorities of Oregon's public health and health care systems.ⁱⁱⁱ

Despite these positive outcomes, and the leveraging of significant federal dollars, the Ways and Means Co-Chairs budget proposes a cut to this program. Cutting state funding to Babies First! would mean 10,000 children and families would no longer benefit from these critical and cost-effective services, and our state progress toward improving maternal and child health would be significantly stalled. I urge the committee to protect our state investment in Babies First! nurse home visiting.

ⁱ Oregon Health Authority. Building Resiliency: Preventing Adverse Childhood Experiences.

<https://public.health.oregon.gov/HealthyPeopleFamilies/DataReports/Documents/OregonACEsReport.pdf>

ⁱⁱ Nurse Family Partnership. What is Evidence-Based Policy? Using Public Dollars Wisely to Support Programs that Work. <http://www.nursefamilypartnership.org/Public-Policy/Evidence-based-policy>

ⁱⁱⁱ Oregon Health Authority. Babies First! Outcomes for High Risk Children up to Age 5.

<http://www.oregon.gov/oha/analytics/HospitalMetricsDocs1/Public%20Health%20Nursing%20Home%20Visiting%20Programs.pdf>