

Supporting evidence for building the capabilities of home visiting supervisors

Recommendation #1. Build the capabilities of home visiting supervisors

- a. Ensure that supervision is supportive and reflective across programs through the use of cross-model trainings, materials, and/or communities of practice based on supervisor core competencies.
- b. Encourage models and programs to require supervisors to routinely observe home visitors during visits or review video-recorded visits to provide feedback and build home visitors' skills in working with families.

The evidence presented here suggests a strong need to **build the capabilities of home visiting supervisors**. Competencies for supervisors are different than for home visitors; supervisor competencies are about supporting the practice of the home visitor, particularly through coaching, mentoring, and providing reflective supervision. Supervisors need additional tools and support to carry out these functions, particularly given the high percentage of relatively inexperienced home visitors across California.

Ensuring supervision is reflective will help develop home visitor's reflective practice skills, strengthen home visitor communication with families, and provide opportunities to address home visitor well-being. Encouraging models and programs to require frequent observations will allow for home visitors to receive timely and important feedback on their practice. Both strategies have been shown to increase program effectiveness in improving outcomes for families and children.¹

Importance of supervision

Supervision plays an essential role in home visiting programs, particularly for the development of new home visitors and their ongoing skill-building. In interviews with key stakeholders, there was consensus that building supervisor capabilities and competencies was an essential first step needed before addressing the competencies of home visitors. It is extremely difficult for individual home visitors to gain skills and apply them in their work with families without the support of a supportive and skillful supervisor.

Supervisors provide support to home visitors by addressing challenging issues on their caseload, allowing them time to reflect on their work, and supporting their overall well-being. One common way for supervisors to support staff is through individual or one-on-one supervision. Most of California's home visitors reported that they receive this type of supervision at least monthly and more than half at least bi-weekly (Table 1).

Table 1. Frequency of one-on-one supervision meetings

	HOME VISITORS 2020 (N = 740)	HOME VISITORS 2021 (N = 444)
Weekly or more frequently	49%	41%
Every two weeks	16%	16%
Every three weeks	2%	2%
Monthly	21%	29%
I do not have one-on-one supervision meetings	12%	11%

Source: Home visiting workforce landscape survey, 2020 and follow-up survey, 2021

¹ Casillas, K. L., Fauchier, A., Derkash, B. T., & Garrido, E. F. (2016). Implementation of evidence-based home visiting programs aimed at reducing child maltreatment: A meta-analytic review. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 53, 64–80.

Home visitors typically find their supervisors’ feedback to be helpful; in 2020, about three-quarters of home visitors reported their supervisors’ feedback was extremely or very helpful. In qualitative interviews, many home visitors described supervision as beneficial due to the support received, especially during difficult situations. Home visitors indicated that supervisors create a “safe space” for home visitors to discuss their caseloads as well as their own personal challenges. Qualities of supervisors that home visitors felt were beneficial included responsiveness, empathy, and accessibility. Example quotes included:

- “I think just knowing that I have her support, knowing that even if I'm wrong she'll support me and she'll help me grow and she'll teach me. She's always sending us trainings articles and videos, just trying to help build us up and support us through wherever we're interested in. And I appreciate that a lot. She's really into...building the team and letting each person of the team have a voice, which I appreciate and I think that it's huge to me because I've had other supervisors that that wasn't the case. And so I really, really appreciate it. I just know that she's supportive, I know that if I have an idea can bring it to her, I know that she won't shut it down, I know she'll listen, I know that I'll be able to try it. So that is a good feeling to have to know that I have some control or some voice in determining how we go about doing things.” - Home Visitor, 2021 Spring/Summer Interview
- “I feel like I learn a lot from my supervisor, but I feel like we learn a lot from one another – personally and professionally. We don’t have to have the same views, but we have respect for one another. We want what’s best for the family.” - Home Visitor, 2021 Case Study

Reflective supervision

One key element of supervision associated with improved outcomes for families and staff is the practice of reflective supervision.² Generally speaking, reflective supervision is the development of a relationship between a supervisor and home visitor that allows for home visitors to openly reflect and consider the families on their caseload from different perspectives in an effort to strengthen how they communicate, interact, and work with families. In 2020, nearly all home visitors in California (93%) reported that their supervision meetings included reflective supervision techniques. In 2021, home visitors reported on the specific ways their supervisor helped them feel supported including reflective supervision practices; the majority of home visitors agreed or strongly agreed that their supervisor made them feel supported in their job (Table 2). Reflective supervision was also important in maintaining home visitor emotional well-being during the pandemic.

One stakeholder providing support for reflective supervision in the state of California noted that a common barrier to successful reflective supervision is the many “hats” that supervisors wear. Many supervisors are responsible for recordkeeping and monitoring of quality, activities that can be at odds with building the trust and ability to share difficult feelings that is central to reflective supervision.

Table 2. Supervisor support using reflective practices (n = 437)

	SOMEWHAT OR STRONGLY AGREE	NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE	SOMEWHAT OR STRONGLY DISAGREE
I trust my supervisor and can talk with them about my concerns about the families I work with	88%	7%	5%
My supervisor encourages me to be supportive of parents	88%	9%	3%
My supervisor is open and approachable	85%	9%	6%

² Casillas, K. L., Fauchier, A., Derkash, B. T., & Garrido, E. F. (2016). Implementation of evidence-based home visiting programs aimed at reducing child maltreatment: A meta-analytic review. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 53, 64–80.

	SOMEWHAT OR STRONGLY AGREE	NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE	SOMEWHAT OR STRONGLY DISAGREE
I trust my supervisor and can talk with them about my own feelings that come up when working with families	84%	9%	7%
My supervisor encourages me to think about the perspective of the families I work with	80%	14%	6%
I trust my supervisor and can talk with them about my own feelings and concerns that come up in my personal life	79%	9%	12%
My supervisor encourages me to keep the baby /child in mind in everything I do	77%	17%	6%
Meeting with my supervisor gives me time to stop and think about my families in a deep way	77%	14%	9%

Source: Home visiting workforce follow-up survey, 2021

Supervisor observation

A second key element of supervision is the observation of home visits conducted by their supervisees. Supervisors' observation of visits is an important skill-building practice for home visitors and has been associated with increased program effectiveness.³ Supervisors' observation of home visits in California is complex; prior to the pandemic, about two-thirds of home visitors received at least one observation per year (Table 3). However, between March 2020 and November 2020, only one-third of home visitors had received at least one observation of a virtual visit, suggesting that supervisor observation during the initial months of COVID was infrequent. In the 2021 survey, home visitors reported higher rates of observation, with about three-quarters of home visitors saying their supervisor observes their visits at least once per year and about half received it at least twice per year.

Table 3. Home visitor report of whether their supervisors observe their visits at least once per year*

	2020 PRE-COVID (N = 723)	2020 DURING COVID (N = 725)	2021 DURING COVID (N = 446)
Percent of home visitors	66%	35%	77%

Source: Home visiting workforce landscape survey, 2020 and follow-up survey, 2021

*Note: Questions were asked differently between survey years; use caution when comparing percentages across years. For 2020 "During COVID," the survey was completed approximately 7-8 months after the beginning of COVID-19 (~March 2020).

Observation of home visits is a successful supervision strategy through its promotion of ongoing feedback on skill development and practice. Across all years, the majority of home visitors (ranging from 78-93%) reported that they always or usually received feedback on their observed visits.

Opportunities to strengthen supervisions

In addition to reflective supervision and supervisor observation, there continues to be other opportunities to strengthen supervision across California's home visiting programs. Home visitors and supervisors both expressed specific challenges and additional needs for strengthening supervision. From the home visitor perspective, interviews suggested that one of the challenges for participating in regular supervision is

³ Ibid.

having sufficient time to do so. Among home visitors who received individual supervision, the majority spend more than 30 minutes in each meeting (Table 4).

Table 4. Average length of one-on-one supervision meetings (n = 653)

	HOME VISITORS
More than 30 minutes	74%
30 minutes	16%
Less than 30 minutes	10%

Source: Home visiting workforce landscape survey, 2020

Home visitors were also asked about additional supervision supports that would be helpful to their work (Table 5). A quarter of home visitors would like more direct supports from their supervisor for working with families, including community engagement, available resources, and strategies for engagement, and slightly fewer would like more emotional support from their supervisor. Among those who felt that their supervisor needed additional training, information, and support (7%), specific examples included training to increase knowledge of the home visiting role and model curriculum, ensuring prior experience as a home visitor, and receiving training and resources on providing supervision.

Table 5. Home visitor report of additional supports that would be helpful

WHAT ADDITIONAL SUPERVISION SUPPORTS WOULD BE HELPFUL TO YOU AND THE WORK YOU DO? (N = 134)	HOME VISITORS
Direct support for working with families (resources, community outreach and supports)	25%
Emotional supports (e.g., understanding and recognition)	23%
More supervision meetings and feedback; problem solving challenges with clients	20%
Additional training and professional development opportunities for home visitors	16%
Group and peer to peer support opportunities; team building activities	13%
Additional training, information, and supports for supervisors	<10%
Other	15%

Source: Home visiting workforce follow-up survey, 2021

Similarly, home visitors reported ways that supervisors could make them feel more supported; these included providing more emotional support, constructive feedback and opportunities for growth, communicating clear expectations, and supporting a positive work environment with trust (Table 6).

Table 6. Ways supervisor can make home visitors feel more supported

HOW COULD YOUR SUPERVISOR MAKE YOU FEEL MORE SUPPORTED IN YOUR JOB? (N = 145)	SUPERVISORS
Emotional Support (e.g., checking-in, recognition, validation)	22%
More supervisor availability and engagement	19%

HOW COULD YOUR SUPERVISOR MAKE YOU FEEL MORE SUPPORTED IN YOUR JOB? (N = 145)	SUPERVISORS
More knowledge and understanding of home visitor workload and responsibilities	19%
Providing constructive feedback and opportunities for growth	18%
Communicate clear expectations with staff	14%
Support a positive work environment with trust (e.g., less micromanaging, belittling)	13%
Other	8%

Source: Home visiting workforce follow-up survey, 2021

From the supervisor perspective, there are also challenges in providing regular supervision to home visitors. In qualitative interviews, most supervisors cited time as the main challenge they face. It can be challenging to reschedule supervision when trainings or other things come up. The pandemic has posed challenges to supervision, as well, and a few supervisors noted they struggled to have the same quality of connection virtually or over the phone. One lamented the loss of the brief, informal check-ins that occur naturally in person, but that are more difficult to recreate in a virtual setting. Example quotes included:

- "I think the biggest challenge is that there's just too many things to check in on. Programs are complicated and the working in a telehealth or virtual model has made it even more so." – Supervisor, 2021 Spring/Summer Interview

Summary

Over the past 18 months, stakeholders have shared that supporting supervisors and building their competencies is critical to the development of the home visiting workforce in California. Both reflective supervision and observation of visits are two key activities that supervisors should engage in more regularly with their staff. These are also two activities that stakeholders felt supervisors needed more training and support to do effectively as they build their competence in these areas. Particularly for reflective supervision, one stakeholder shared how it is like a muscle that needs work and encouraged supervisors to be given more opportunities to practice their reflective supervision. Furthermore, for first time supervisors, stakeholders emphasized the need for additional training, materials, and opportunities to connect with other supervisors across the state while developing these skills and competencies. One possibility is the creation of a learning community for supervisors that would specifically be focused on reflective supervision. To continue to strengthen the home visiting workforce, supervisors need additional opportunities to practice skills and build their capabilities to strengthen home visitor capacity.