

# Supporting evidence for defining home visiting as a profession for the state of California

## Recommendation #2. Define home visiting as a profession for the state of California

a. Clearly define the necessary skills and related activities in which home visitors engage and define the skills needed to supervise and support home visitors, regardless of model. These skills should be supported by hiring managers and used in hiring decisions.

b. Create a core set of cross-model home visitor competencies and parallel competencies for supervisors. Example competencies could include knowledge of child health and development, skills in supporting parent-child attachment, and attitudes that value the parent's role.

The evidence presented here suggests a strong need to **define home visiting as a profession**. The considerable variability in the educational backgrounds of home visitors across California not only creates a lack of cohesion in the types of knowledge and skills that home visiting staff bring to their work, but it also reflects the fact that the home visiting profession has not been established and the required core skills needed to be a home visitor have not been uniformly defined. These challenges are further exacerbated by the absence of frameworks that clearly describe the competencies needed to effectively support families in home visiting programs across the state. Explicitly defining the skills necessary for home visitors will address the lack of cohesion across staff educational backgrounds, acknowledge how program models have similar but often overlapping requirements for staff, and identify the core set of skills that all programs and supervisors need to support as part of home visitor's development (in addition to program-specific knowledge and skills). Having this set of skills defined will promote development of the home visiting profession rooted in a shared understanding of the role of home visitor.

In addition, creating core competencies will inform how these necessary skills can be strengthened and supported through pre- and in-service training, supervision, coaching, and professional

development. Using competencies to support staff can help develop actionable steps to improve skills. Competencies will allow for the home visiting profession to focus on a core set of skills and strengths that are ubiquitous across program models.

## Home visiting staff educational backgrounds

Most home visiting models have required or preferred educational backgrounds for hiring home visitors, with many (but not all) requiring a bachelor's degree. In California, the majority of home visiting staff hold a bachelor's degree or higher; however, staff represent many different educational backgrounds, including child development, early childhood education, psychology, social work/social welfare, and nursing (see Table 1). In addition, home visitors have a range of skills and certifications in other areas, particularly related to child development (Table 2). While these varied backgrounds help California's home visiting workforce in meet a range of family strengths and needs, they also reveal the need for a core set of skills or competencies to ensure all home visitors have the necessary skills to provide services across different programs and models.

**Table 1.** Staff educational attainment

HIGHEST DEGREE (n = 787)	HOME VISITORS
High school diploma, GED, or less	4%
Some college, no degree	12%
Associate's degree	16%
Bachelor's degree	58%

Master's degree (e.g., MA, MS, MSW)	10%
<b>FIELD OF STUDY IN TECHNICAL SCHOOL OR COLLEGE (n = 768)</b>	<b>HOME VISITORS</b>
Child development	33%
Early childhood education	21%
Nursing	17%
Psychology	16%
Social work/Social welfare	15%
Human development and family studies	10%
Public health	8%
Education	8%
Other	21%

Source: Home visiting workforce landscape survey, 2020

**Table 2.** Licenses and certifications held by the workforce

<b>LICENSES AND CERTIFICATIONS (N = 906)</b>	<b>HOME VISITORS</b>
Certified Lactation Educator	17%
California Child Development Permit	15%
Registered Nurse (RN)	15%
Certified Parenting Educator	12%
Preschool Child Development Associate (CDA)	7%
Infant/Toddler Child Development Associate (CDA)	6%
Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA)	4%
Other state teaching certification (e.g., early childhood, K-12)	3%
Home Visitor Child Development Associate (CDA)	3%
Other	19%

Source: Home visiting workforce landscape survey, 2020

## Home visiting staff recruitment

In addition to educational requirements or preferences, programs often seek home visitor candidates with past related experience. For instance, programs and supervisors look for experience working with families and conducting home visits, as well as interpersonal skills, organizational skills, and knowledge of child health and development (Table 3).

**Table 3.** Top 5 knowledge, skills, and experiences sought when recruiting home visitors

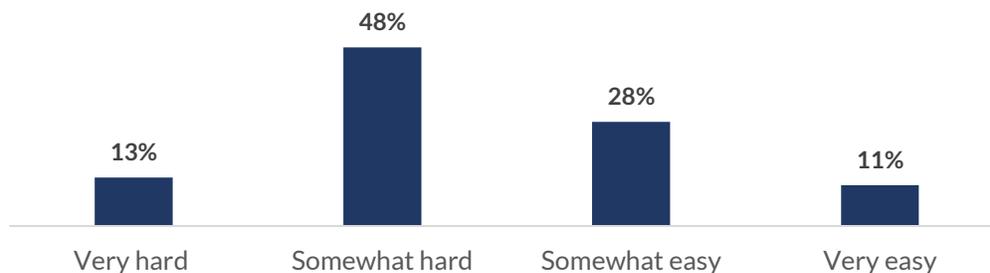
<b>KNOWLEDGE, SKILLS, AND EXPERIENCES (N = 140)</b>	<b>SUPERVISORS</b>
Experience working with families in any setting	84%

KNOWLEDGE, SKILLS, AND EXPERIENCES (N = 140)	SUPERVISORS
Interpersonal skills	67%
Experience conducting home visits	64%
Knowledge of child health and development	64%
Organizational skills	56%

Source: Home visiting workforce landscape survey, 2020

However, even though supervisors were able to identify the top knowledge, skills, and experiences sought when recruiting home visitors, they also reported challenges in recruiting qualified home visitor candidates. More than 60 percent of supervisors felt that recruiting qualified home visitors is somewhat hard or very hard (Figure 1). Difficulties in recruiting home visitors included finding staff who had relevant experience and expertise, experience working with Tribal communities, and bilingual ability.

**Figure 1.** Level of difficulty in recruiting qualified home visitor candidates (n = 112)



Source: Home visiting workforce landscape survey, 2020

## Current use of competency frameworks

Competency frameworks can support both hiring and ongoing skill development for home visitors. However, very few home visiting programs in California have competency frameworks in place to support hiring new staff; only 16 percent of supervisors reported that their program uses any competency framework for hiring, training, or supporting staff. Stakeholders at many levels expressed interest in using competencies across programs with different home visiting models. In addition, during core competency feasibility case studies, individual programs in California identified specific ways they could use the competencies for hiring, training, and supporting staff. Staff also discussed potential challenges of using competencies. Example quotes from home visiting staff include:

### Hiring

- “We could enhance our hiring materials with these;” and “I would say it’s a really good tool to use when training and onboarding staff – as a guide in the right direction.”
- “I think you could use them [the competencies] in terms of hiring - with different interview questions that you ask, or vignettes that you utilize. You could look at what stage they are in in terms of their own professional development. Do they have the knowledge? And then, being able to see – how do they apply it for those next two levels? .... I think we could frame some of the questions around some of the competencies in these domains.”

## Training

- “I see this as a guide for how we educate our staff and the type of trainings we should be seeking out for them – almost like a manager’s tool.”
- “I think about how impactful trainings around all of this [the competencies] would be for existing staff who already have immense experience in doing the work for so long. This would next level them. To see how it’s all connected makes it feel very complete.”

## Supporting staff

- “I thought it was very, very helpful. It really made me aware of what I’m doing, and a better understanding of why I’m doing it, as well.”
- “We could use this when we observe to see which of these domains we cover when we are conducting a visit. We could catch some domains we aren’t covering that are being asked by the parents. It could support staff on how to add some of these domains to our visits.”
- “In terms of professional development [the competencies] would absolutely be helpful in identifying strengths and areas of growth. Pointing those out to help individualize professional development so it’s not generic. Also, we like the idea of using it annual performance evaluations. Let’s see the difference in this year from last year. What changed? What direction are you going in?”

## Challenges

- “There would be definite challenges – not only financially – but even if it would be feasible to do without a lot of support.”
- “These [competencies] are a good baseline, but every community has a different population and there are different needs in each area. Not everything can be applicable to overall California, because every community has a different set of needs that have to be met.”

## Summary

Over the past 18 months, stakeholders have shared that the heterogeneity of the home visiting workforce is both a strength of the field but also an area of opportunity. On one hand, the varied backgrounds of home visiting staff allow some to be more prepared to address specific family strengths and needs (e.g., nursing backgrounds and health-related needs) and others to be better prepared for particular home visiting models. However, this also leads to a mixed perception of the home visiting profession (e.g., all home visitors have nursing backgrounds). These misunderstandings have significant implications for workforce preparation (i.e., training) to meet the diverse strengths and needs of families. With the continued expansion of home visiting across California, it is critical to define home visiting as a profession and to identify core home visiting skills that can be further supported through competencies. This recommendation supports the state’s goal of a coordinated workforce infrastructure by addressing current gaps in the field’s foundational areas of workforce development, specifically by developing core competencies in education and training and embedding competencies within recruitment.