Illinois Home Visiting:
Quality Recommendations
Illinois is a national leader in the field of home visiting with more than a thirty year history of serving families. In 2012-2013, Illinois devoted a portion of the federal State Advisory Council grant for efforts to advance quality supports for intensive home visiting for families with children birth to age three. The Home Visiting Quality project advanced the development of quality initiatives of program model developers and public funders. Leadership partners in the project included the Illinois Department of Human Services, Illinois State Board of Education, Illinois Governor’s Office of Early Childhood Development, the Ounce of Prevention Fund, Chicago Public Schools, Parents As Teachers National Center, Baby TALK, Inc., Healthy Families America and Positive Parenting DuPage.

In April 2013, the leadership partners convened two one-day ‘Innovations in Quality: Home Visiting Summits’. More than 650 of Illinois’ home visiting workforce and stakeholders attended the Summits. Designed to showcase advances in quality initiatives, the Summits also facilitated the extensive collection of data and perspectives about quality in home visiting from community-based providers.

The leadership partners met during the summer to process, synthesize, and analyze the input of providers from the Summits. The body of input was organized in a manner consistent with the state’s approach to early childhood systems building: quality assurance, training and technical assistance, assessment and evaluation, and the use of data. This approach represents the structures of any state system purposed to promote and assure quality service delivery to children and families.

The leadership partners’ review of the information from the home visiting field resulted in the recommendations and action steps set forth in this document. These recommendations and action steps are provided to:

- Demonstrate the alignment of the statewide home visiting infrastructure with other federal initiatives focused on young children. (The Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge and the Maternal and Infant Early Childhood Home Visiting.)
- Advance home visiting as a key component of state systems serving families prenatally through five years.
- Ensure messages on quality about home visiting are clear, easy to use and accessible to policy makers in their work.
- Inform and educate stakeholders, constituents, and prospective partners.

The recommendations and action steps are for:

- Home Visitors
- Administrators, Directors, Managers and Supervisors
- Grant Writers
- Funders
- School and Organization Boards
- Policy Makers
- Business Leaders
- State System Leaders
- Higher Education
- National Model Developers
- System Leaders in other states
- Illinois Early Learning Council
- Illinois Home Visiting Task Force
- Other State and Federal Leaders of Maternal Infant Early Childhood Home Visiting

Lastly, it is hoped these recommendations and action steps demonstrate to the home visiting work force in Illinois that their input is invaluable to the success of the home visiting infrastructure in Illinois and to the delivery of quality services.
Recommendations & Action Steps

Recommendation #1:
Strengthen the shared understanding of the value of home visiting and the unique role it has in the overall system of care for children prenatally through age five.

Action Step
Ensure representation of home visiting is at all venues where policy and systems change will impact families of children prenatally through five years.

Recommendation #2
Strengthen the engagement of families in all aspects of home visiting, from the nature of service to the development of community systems.

Action Steps
Utilize a cross model and funder work group to create a set of guiding principles for family involvement. These principles would delineate best practices and robust research on parent leadership development, specify family engagement strategies, and identify models for successful implementation.

Create leadership opportunities for parents and caregivers that may include: a lead role in programming, organizational and strategic planning, decision-making, connecting to community resources, and other means for genuine partnerships to ensure the program reflects the needs of the community.

Recommendation #3
Ensure that public funds for home visiting are distributed in the state based on community need (as demonstrated by data), and are both stable and at levels that support quality in services and staff stability.

Action Steps
Examine the process of funding decisions for home visiting programs across Illinois to ensure distribution and preservation of resources are based on community need.

Develop shared recommendations across funding sources for coordination of funding decisions and accountability.

Recommendation #4
Promote and monetize the impact of home visiting.

Action Steps
Invest in studies to articulate the benefits and public savings achieved through home visitation to address the needs of policy makers to advocate for funding.

Create a shared, statewide articulation of goals and measures that would address the questions “What are we hoping to impact with home visiting?” and “How will we know if we’ve been successful?”

Create and distribute public awareness materials normalizing home visiting as a valuable resource to families.

Widely publicize the impact of home visiting to engage broader constituencies in the investment in children birth to age three (e.g. business community).
Recommendation #5: Continuously strengthen and advance model fidelity in home visiting programs.

Action Steps
Create a framework for the partnership between national models and local programs that ensures a pipeline for access to information and resources, support for integrating new model specific information and assistance in building program capacity.

Update the Home Visiting Toolkit to identify each program model’s quality assurance process and measures. Study the assessment tools to compare how each model assesses quality.

Recommendation #6: Create and maintain a structure to ensure that input from the home visiting workforce informs Illinois’ home visiting infrastructure and shapes the delivery of quality services.

Action Step
Identify and assess existing methods for input (such as statewide conferences, salary surveys, training needs assessment and representation of home visitors on state level committees) to ensure the input is cohesive and consistently fed into the decision-making cycle.

Recommendation #7: Use training and technical assistance to promote a culture of shared responsibility for quality. Emphasize the essential role of home visiting staff to ensure quality in service delivery and family outcomes.

Action Steps
Utilize current training and technical assistance to advance the value of shared responsibility for monitoring and managing quality in practice. Ensure that training and technical assistance is consistently provided: address quality assurance concepts, advance the practice of routine feedback on and emphasize the importance of the quality of supervision of staff and managers.

Utilize a program-driven work group to create an action plan to support and guide organizations to carry out internal self-assessment as part of ongoing operations.

Recommendation #8: Ensure equal access to training and technical assistance to Illinois home visiting programs that is program model-specific and based on criteria for quality that is shared across funders.

Action Step
Establish a work group of the Illinois Home Visiting Task Force to analyze the variances in access to training and technical assistance; include a cost analysis to scale the support structure across all models.

Recommendation #9: Identify the personal characteristics, attributes and dispositions of successful home visitors, supervisors and program managers common to all home visiting models.

Action Step
Develop a list of known qualities and qualifications (beyond formal education, skill acquisition and model expertise) which are associated with successful home visiting staff. This resource could strengthen hiring and professional development decisions at the local level and impact stability in the home visiting workforce at large.
Recommendation #10
Maximize support for home visiting programs to actively engage in local community collaborations. Needs and resources are not static in communities; home visiting needs to be part of the agile response to changes that comes with a collective approach to community systems.

Action Steps
Integrate collaboration skill development into training and technical assistance. Utilize the state Community Systems Development Toolkit for skill building resources and strategic thinking.

Utilize local community collaborations in an advisory and input role for home visiting programs.

Recommendation #11
Articulate the relationship and value of group services in home visiting programs.

Action Step
Develop a logic model for group services covering the purpose, intended impact and measures of effectiveness of group services in the context of a home visiting program.

Recommendation #12
Raise the standards of program accountability across program models and funders to advance the impact of home visiting.

Action Steps
Develop a statewide set of data points across program models and funders. Identify data points that will address the goal of each funder. Align reporting, training and assessment efforts.

Conduct a survey to assess current use and staff ability to access, process and apply research in their practice. Report the results with recommendations to eliminate barriers and build the capacity of professionals and programs.

Recommendation #13
Implement a continuous quality improvement process across all home visiting sites in Illinois.

Action Step
Analyze the infrastructure and funding needs to bring the continuous quality improvement process to scale across all programs.

Leadership Partners

Jeanna Capito
Donna Emmons
Teresa Kelly
Pamela King
Rima Malhotra
Mattie McClaurin
Greg O’Donnell
Andrea Palmer
Ana Maria Serrano

Penny Smith
Joanna Su
Patti Torchia
Mark Valentine
Liliana Velazquez
Janelle Weldin-Frisch
Deb Widenhofer
Kelly Woodlock

For more information, contact:
Janelle Weldin-Frisch
Ounce of Prevention Fund
jweldinfrisch@ounceofprevention.org