

COVID-19 Impact on Home Visiting

On March 17, 2020, the Washington State Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) provided guidance in response to the COVID-19 pandemic for Home Visiting Services Account funded home visiting programs, allowing them to shift services to fully virtual (video-based) or remote (telephone-based) visits with enrolled families.

Like many other services, home visiting programs shifted quickly to working and serving families virtually and remotely. While some programs took a short pause to reset services and examine the capacity and interest for families to engage, others moved immediately to serving families from a distance. Programs were proactive and sought out training and supports to serve families effectively in remote and virtual formats.

The initial pivot had an impact on services and some families opted to not continue because of needing to address immediate needs of their family, lacking technology, or preferring to wait until in-person services could resume. Additionally, referrals from partners in the community for families into home visiting slowed down for the first few months of the pandemic. Through the summer and into the fall, referrals and enrollment in home visiting services rebounded and remained stable.

While there are some limitations to virtual and remote only services, home visitors continue to utilize creative strategies to support parents in reaching their goals for their children and themselves, developing new parenting skills, and addressing their family's immediate needs. Home visiting programs report that home visitors safely drop or mail materials or supplies in advance of visits, are connecting with families more often than previously, and family needs are especially acute during the pandemic. Home visiting programs will continue to operate virtual and remote services through the pandemic and with in-person (outdoor) visits happening. Additionally, home visitors are seeing parents take the lead during the virtual home visits, demonstrating interactions and activities with their child, showing an increase in parenting efficacy and the partnership between home visitors and parents.



Home Visits By Type January - December 2021



Family Story

A family with five children had been in the program for about 18 months and stayed with the program even after their home visitor was no longer able to serve them. The mother has a lot on her plate with five children, and the father is an essential worker (construction), working long hours. Her new home visitor focused on supporting mom by creating or showing activities the mom could use at home to engage the children. The mother expressed much thankfulness, since engaging five children all at home due to the stay-at-home order can often be overwhelming. The activities included things that supported physical and cognitive growth, such as a homemade bowling set, a coloring activity, stacking cups with balls, among activities.

In March, when visits went virtual, the home visitor stayed in close contact with mom to continue to support the family. The mother was now juggling a newborn along with virtual schooling for the older ones. In April, the mother came down with a significant sickness, potentially COVID-19. Because the family does not have health insurance, the mother was afraid to go to the hospital or clinic. The home visitor continued to stay in close contact, providing emotional support and engaging the family via zoom visits and continuing to do door drop offs of activities for the family. The mother said the support during such a hard time was invaluable. The mother has since recovered, as have the children and the family remains resilience. While not in person, the virtual visits and phone connections during the COVID-19 pandemic continue to promote child development, reduce parental stress and support parent-child bonds.

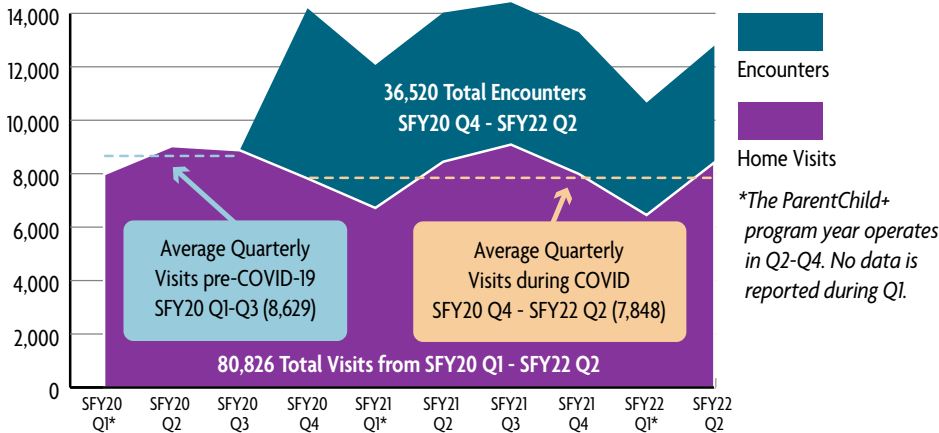


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Impact on the Data and What We Have Learned

HVSA Home Visiting Engagements by Quarter, SFY20 Q1 – SFY22 Q2 (July 2019 – December 2021)



Definitions

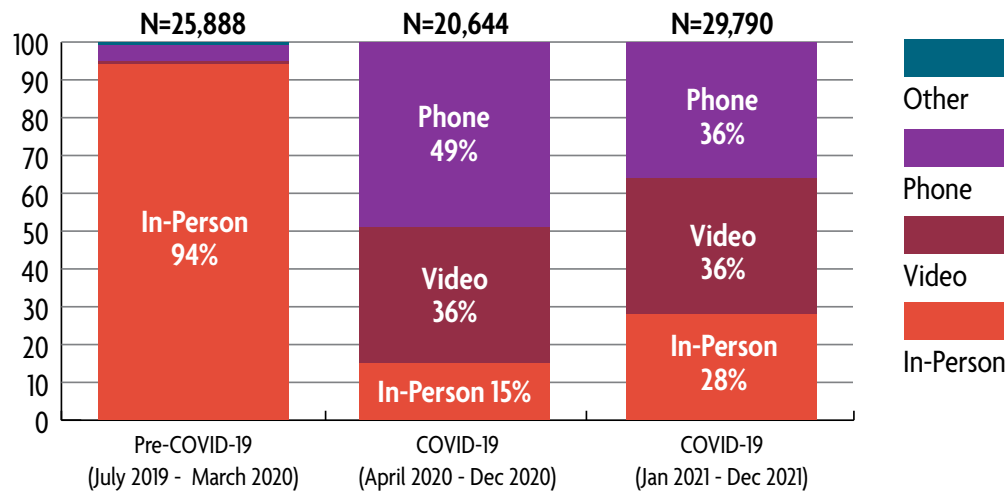
Home Visit: In-person, virtual, or phone visit with model content.

Encounter: Alternative engagement during Stay Home order, including phone, email, text, or porch drop-offs.

DCYF provided guidance to programs in April to report new interactions with families: encounters. Encounters are an alternative to content-rich home visits. Many families can't complete a 60-minute video call or are not comfortable with an outdoor visit. Instead home visitors keep in touch via email or porch drop-offs, with a focus on meeting families' needs. While programs reported a reduction in number of visits, they started reporting alternative encounters. Overall, families are engaging in the programs, but in different ways than before.

Figure 1: Average quarterly visits declined since the start of the pandemic from 8,629 to 7,848. However, LIAs continue to engage with families for a total of 117,346 engagements (home visits + encounters) from SFY 20 Q1 through SFY 22 Q2 (July 2019 through December 2021). The drop in home visits during the pandemic is attributable to the pivot to virtual care and encounters as well as a reduction in number of families served from 2,786 in SFY 2020 (7/2019-6/2020) to 2,585 in SFY 2021 (7/2020-6/2021).

Method of Home Visits before and during COVID-19, July 2019 – December 2021



*4,504 (8%) of COVID visits reported are of unknown type and are not included in the figure.