NEWS RELEASE
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Parents as Teachers-Led Collaborative to Grow a Rapid Response Effort to Support Nation’s Home Visiting Field
$1.1 million grant will keep families “virtually” connected to parenting services

St. Louis, MO – April 7, 2020 -- During this unprecedented, COVID-19 public health crisis, leaders in the national home visiting field are forming a rapid response collaborative to create and support the dissemination of free resources on virtual family interactions for home visitors.

The Rapid Response Virtual Home Visiting (RR-VHV) collaborative, led by Parents as Teachers National Center (PATNC), together with the Institute for the Advancement Family Support Professionals (IAFSP, and the National Alliance of Home Visiting Models, is funded by a $1.13 million grant from the Heising-Simons Foundation.

The collaboration, spurred by recent social distancing measures and the increased isolation of families, represents a full-throttle effort to provide rapid, best practice principles and strategies to support home visiting professionals in maintaining meaningful connections with families during the health crisis.

“Providing immediate telehealth support for our front-line home visiting staff and the families they serve is our highest priority,” said Constance Gully, PATNC’s president and chief executive officer.

Home visiting is a relationship-based prevention strategy, where home visiting professionals, typically early childhood educators, social workers, or nurses, meet with families voluntarily in their homes to share a range of parenting supports and screenings.

Angela Rau, a PATNC virtual home visiting specialist and principal investigator in one of the nation’s first virtual home visiting feasibility studies, said: “During this pandemic, live, interactive
services and even telephone calls will enable clinicians and home visiting professionals to provide critical parenting, child development, and family-well-being support.”

Janet Horras, State Home Visitation director at the Bureau of Family Health at the Iowa Department of Public Health, said: “With resources provided by the new grant, home visitors will be better able to obtain critical guidance and professional development about how to continue serving families.”

Horras, who is a part of the team that operates the Institute’s dynamic learning platform, added that: “A team of experts will quickly address and refine the answers to questions such as, how does a home visitor conduct a developmental screening virtually, or guide a caregiver in parent-child-interaction on a virtual platform or by telephone.”

Resources through the new collaborative will be provided free of charge and made accessible to providers through multiple platforms. During this pandemic, countless families have already experienced significant financial fall-out. Last week, 6.6 million American’s filed for unemployment compensation.

“Families are changing fast,” said PATNC President Gully. “They have an unprecedented amount of family stress. Without this swift response, the rise in numbers of isolated families may cause an increase in child maltreatment.”

Jeanna Capito, coordinator of the National Alliance for Home Visiting Models, another partner in the collaboration, agreed, echoing the need for “Protective factors, which reduce the likelihood of maltreatment, including social supports, nurturing parenting skills, and stable familial relations.”

According to a report by First Focus, child neglect rose during prior recessions and remained high in their aftermath, indicating that child neglect tracks closely with economic hardship. Caregivers experience more significant cumulative adverse life events, which impacts parenting stress.

Evidence-based home visiting is widely credited with research-proven outcomes such as reduced child maltreatment, improved family well-being, and improved parenting practices. It is a family engagement intervention that is broadly supported by the federal government, states, and tribes for the nation’s most stressed families. Currently, it reaches only a fraction of the number of families who are eligible for services.

EDITOR’S NOTE: To arrange an interview with any of the collaborative member organizations, please contact Bart Holland at the information listed above. Otherwise, feel free to include all or any of this information in upcoming reports on virtual telehealth home visitation efforts.

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About Parents as Teachers

Parents as Teachers is an evidence-based home-visiting model that focuses on families during pregnancy and the early years. Parents as Teachers provides parents and other adults in the home with tools to help their children thrive, including supporting parents in combatting the social determinants of health that contribute to maternal mortality and morbidity, providing social support, addressing parental stress, and helping families navigate the health care system.

Parents as Teachers is internationally recognized and backed by 35 years of research with proven outcomes for children and families. It currently serves 193,200 families in 50 U.S. states, 115 Tribal organizations, five other countries and one U.S. territory. Parents as Teachers is headquartered in St. Louis, Missouri. Parents as Teachers affiliates operate in various settings, including health departments, hospitals, and schools, faith-based and non-profit organizations. For more information, visit www.parentsasteachers.org or follow on Twitter @NatlPAT.

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