



ADMINISTRATION FOR
CHILDREN & FAMILIES

330 C Street, S.W., Washington, D.C. 20201 | www.acf.hhs.gov

April 13, 2020

Dear Tribal Leader,

I am grateful for the strong leadership tribes have displayed as sovereign nations to protect the health and well-being of your community members. The safety of people is a priority for all across the nation and this has been a trying time in history. The Administration for Children and Families (ACF) is committed to seeking innovative solutions to support families during the COVID-19 crisis. In response, I want to share information about an important ACF program that could be helpful to Native American families during this crisis.

The [ACF Tribal Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting \(MIECHV\)](#) program involves a home visitor (nurse, social worker, early childhood professional, community member) who works with a pregnant woman or family with young children. MIECHV helps to link families to services and supports in the community, provides education around parenting and child development, and provides social support and mentorship. Tribal home visiting programs exist in a growing number of tribal communities, either through an ACF program or through some other federal, tribal, state, local, or private source of funding. In 2018, 91 tribally-led organizations implemented home visiting services and served 4,177 families of which 1,801 were served by the ACF Tribal MIECHV program.

Though tribal home visiting programs usually involve in-person visits to the home, these programs can still be supportive during the COVID-19 pandemic. Home visiting model developers have issued guidance stating that virtual or telehealth home visits can be considered home visits according to their guidelines. ACF, which has 23 Tribal MIECHV grantees, has affirmed the ability of its grantees to provide virtual visits and to allow their staff to work remotely.

The services tribal home visiting programs provide, even virtually, can be particularly helpful in this crisis. The advantages of providing services virtually during this time include:

- COVID-19 is isolating families in their homes, and virtual home visiting can give families a lifeline and a way to feel connected to others in the community. Home visitors have existing strong relationships with families that they can build on.
- Home visitors are able to provide families with supports around parenting, including activities to do with children and assistance dealing with challenging child behaviors. Many programs are able to serve all children under 6 in the home, including those who

may now be at home instead of in their Head Start or pre-kindergarten classroom. Providing this support to parents can ultimately help prevent child abuse and neglect, which many fear may increase during social distancing.

- It has been reported that stay-at-home orders may contribute to increased domestic violence and substance use; home visitors are able to talk with families about the challenges they are facing and provide tools to work through them.
- Tribal home visitors are knowledgeable about all the resources and supports available in the community to support families. They can connect families to the supports they need to meet their basic needs as the pandemic progresses. Tribal home visitors are also able to drop off much-needed supplies to families without entering the home or having in person contact.

There are some barriers to the provision of virtual home visiting services, but ACF's Tribal MIECHV program has provided policy flexibilities to allow grantees to address these barriers. For example, grantees are able to use available funds to purchase items that would facilitate conducting virtual home visiting program activities, including technology, supplies, internet, and phone cards. Even with changes in their work patterns, Tribal MIECHV home visitors are still able to receive their full salaries and benefits based on their tribe's policies related to paying salaries under unexpected or extraordinary circumstances. It is also important to note that the Tribal MIECHV program does not require a non-federal share, meaning that there is no additional burden on the tribe to continue operating the program during a state of emergency.

Thank you for your attention to this issue. We believe tribal home visiting programs have the potential to be an essential service, provided virtually, to support the health and well-being of tribal families during the COVID-19 pandemic. ACF is happy to work with any community with a tribal home visiting program to help them maintain critical services to vulnerable families. For more information about the Tribal MIECHV program, please visit <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/occ/home-visiting/tribal-home-visiting>.

Kind Regards,



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