

# Press Release

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## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## Prevent Child Abuse America advises caution on conclusions of new evidence-based programs study from the Washington State Institute for Public Policy

CHICAGO, IL - August 25, 2008 - The Washington State Institute for Public Policy (WSIPP) has just released a new report titled *Evidence-Based Programs to Prevent Children from Entering and Remaining in the Child Welfare System: Benefits and Costs for Washington* on cost-effectiveness of programs in preventing or reducing involvement of children in the child welfare system ([wsipp.wa.gov/pub.asp?docid=08-07-3901](http://wsipp.wa.gov/pub.asp?docid=08-07-3901)). Prevent Child Abuse America applauds the state of Washington for this study that focuses on whether and which prevention programs work and are cost effective.

“The whole field of prevention benefits when we tackle the hard questions about prevention and what works,” says James M. Hmurovich, President & CEO, Prevent Child Abuse America. “We need good evidence so we, as a nation can make good decisions on prevention strategies. We will be doing our part by attempting to identify potential researchers and funders to launch a detailed longitudinal study on Healthy Families America (HFA).

That said, we do have some concerns about the conclusions of the WSIPP study.” The WSIPP report considers only the most rigorous evaluations of HFA and many other programs. Only a few findings from each evaluation were included, ignoring most of the benefits from these programs.

“In general, while the WSIPP study is rigorous and systematic in its methodology,” says Kathryn Harding, Principal Analyst, Prevent Child Abuse America, “there are a number of conclusions stated without adequate acknowledgement of the limitations of this type of research. If policy-makers and other readers don’t understand the full picture, they can’t make the best decisions. We are concerned that overreliance on this cost study could unnecessarily limit community choices or cut services to some families. It would be very premature to cut established programs based on the limited current evidence.”

Prevent Child Abuse America further raises the following concerns/comments:

- We are still learning about the factors which impact home visiting effectiveness, especially how and why certain families benefit more than others;



- Only a few program benefits were considered. Many of the programs reviewed address a much broader range of goals that seek to address the many inter-connected pathways that lead to child maltreatment;
- Only a few programs considered in the cost study have had the opportunity to study long-term benefits. It will be time consuming, expensive and difficult to develop similarly rigorous research studies for more home visitation services over a longer period of time and HFA has not yet completed long-term follow-up studies to assess these benefits. This however does not mean the program does not have long-term benefits;
- A single study may not be representative of an entire model. This is certainly true for HFA, which has as one of its strengths, the premise that local communities should make decisions about their service and service delivery needs. This strength in and of itself works against Healthy Families America in a study such as this, because HFA evaluations assess such a wide range of benefits to families, instead of a standard set of outcomes;
- Utilizing child maltreatment reports may not be the most effective manner to assess program impacts. This is due to several factors such as reporting differences across study locations and the presence of a service provider in the home. This factor alone translates to an increase in detection of maltreatment among families receiving home visiting but not those families they are being compared to who are not; and
- Cost-benefit analysis is useful for synthesizing large amounts of information, but even the best such analysis is limited by the quality of the information being analyzed and the judgments that those writing the report make during the analytical process. The results of a cost-benefit analysis are going to be tentative at best, and any conclusions should be treated cautiously.

“Ultimately,” says Hmurovich, “we concur with a nationally-recognized expert’s assessment in 2005 that, ‘In sum, these analyses should be considered starting points in assessing the costs and benefits of home visiting programs and not the final word on the subject. In future, more careful assessment of costs as programs are ongoing and a more comprehensive cataloguing of benefits might be helpful ([ced.org/docs/report/report\\_ivk\\_gomby\\_2005.pdf](http://ced.org/docs/report/report_ivk_gomby_2005.pdf)).”

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#### **ABOUT PREVENT CHILD ABUSE AMERICA**

Prevent Child Abuse America, founded in Chicago in 1972 is the nation’s leading organization working solely to prevent the abuse and neglect of our nation’s children. Through its chapters in 44 states and its voluntary home visitation services provided by Healthy Families America® in more than 400 communities nationwide, Prevent Child Abuse America helps provide healthy, stable and nurturing experiences for more than 100,000 families every year. For more information, please visit [www.preventchildabuse.org](http://www.preventchildabuse.org) and [www.healthyfamiliesamerica.org](http://www.healthyfamiliesamerica.org).

