



# **TUSLA National Home Visiting Programme**

**Strategy 2025 – 2028**

**May 2025**

## Contents

1.	Purpose and Function of the National Home Visiting Programme:.....	3
2.	Primary Functions:.....	3
3.	Background: .....	4
3.	Governance and Oversight: .....	4
4.	What Is the National Home Visiting Programme Trying to Achieve: .....	5
5.	Challenges:.....	6
6.	Guiding Principles .....	7
7.	Conclusion.....	8

## National Home Visiting Programme Strategy 2025 – 2028

### 1. Purpose and Function of the National Home Visiting Programme:

The National Home Visiting Programme was established by Tusla in 2024. The aim of the programme is to coordinate, provide direction and collect evidence and data to inform the future development of a sustainable national home visiting service. The Programme will run for five years from 2024 to 2028.

### 2. Primary Functions:

The role of the National Home Visiting Programme is to develop a consistent approach to the delivery of Home Visiting in Ireland.

Home Visiting focusses on the development of a trusted relationship between the parent/s and Home Visitor, supporting parents in pregnancy and early childhood, with the delivery of an evidence-based Programme in the family's home, that promotes infant and child health, fosters educational development and school readiness, promotes parental wellbeing, confidence, and connectivity with their community, and helps prevent child abuse and neglect. Early childhood evidence-based Home Visiting is a prevention and early intervention approach providing targeted universal support to parents and their babies and young children. The Programmes seek to positively influence several outcomes for both parents and children. These include support during pregnancy, new-born care and promoting child development so that children are supported through transitions into early learning education and prepared for school; parenting self-efficacy; and connections to support in the wider community.

Different models of Home Visiting exist. Five of the most common are Preparing for Life, Lifestart, Parent Child+, Infant Mental Health Home Visiting and Community Families. The duration of each Home Visiting programme varies although most are provided for a period of two years or longer. The frequency of visits also varies, from twice weekly to monthly visits depending on the needs of the family.

### 3. Background:

In 2021, the government published the Action Plan for Survivors and Former Residents of Mother and Baby Home Institutions. Article 18 of this plan set out the government's commitment to 'honour the memory of the children who died in Mother and Baby Homes through the creation of a specific fund which supports children who experience disadvantage in the present day'. This Fund was named the Children's Fund.

A Panel of experts recommended that the Children's Fund support the development of Home Visiting, and the DCEDIY, Tusla and the HSE worked together to develop recommendations on the creation of a sustainable, coordinated Home Visiting Service.

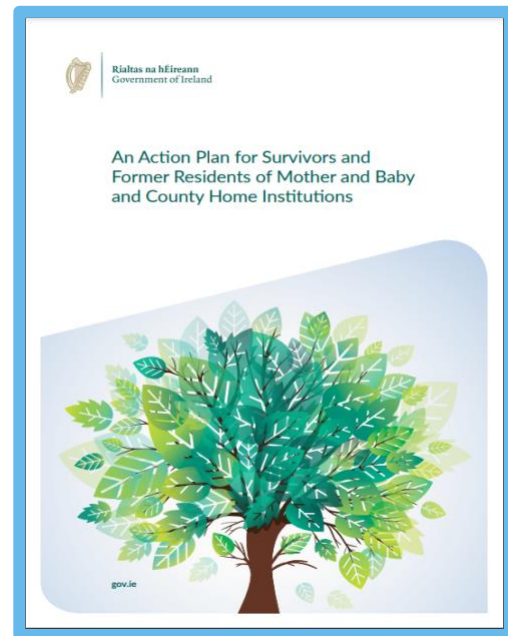
The development of the National Home Visiting Programme has been informed by wider Governmental Policy which sets out the priority to support parents to promote the best outcomes in early childhood. These include:

- ✚ First 5: A Whole Government Strategy for Parents and Babies (DCDE, 2019-2028)
- ✚ Supporting Parents: A National Model for Parenting Support (DCDE, 2022)
- ✚ Tusla Parenting Support Strategy (Tusla, 2022)
- ✚ Young Ireland: National Policy Framework for Children & Young People 2023 – 2028 (DCDE 2023)

The development has also been Informed by key studies and research, such as 'Home Visiting: A National Vision for the Future' (DCEDIY 2024), 'The Economic Case for Home Visiting' by Dr Orla Doyle, UCD and the Home Visiting Alliance 'Feasibility Study' (2023).

### 3. Governance and Oversight:

A Governance Group was established, led by the Department of Children, Disability and Equality's Child Rights Policy Unit and PPFS National Manager, and attended by Parenting Support Policy Unit Department of Children, Disability and Equality, Tusla, HSE National Healthy Child Programme and National Public Health Nursing Lead. The posts of National Home Visiting Programme Manager and Data Quality Officer were employed in October 2024. They report to the National Manager for Prevention, Partnership and Family Support (PPFS). The Governance Group met on a monthly basis for the first 12 months. Thereafter the Governance Group will meet on a quarterly basis for the duration of the Programme. In 2025, the governance oversight transferred from the Child Rights Policy Unit to the Parenting Support Policy Unit in the Department of Children, Disability and Equality.



The Governance Group is supported further by the Advisory Group with the National Home Visiting Programme. The role of the Advisory Group is to provide advice, support and guidance, and to ensure recommendations are escalated to the Home Visiting Governance Group. It is not a decision-making group.

It is chaired by the National Home Visiting Programme Manager and its membership includes Department of Child, Disability and Equality; HSE (Public Health Nursing management, Director of Midwifery, National Women and Infants Health Programme, and Consultant in Public Health Medicine, Child Health Public Health); Home Visiting Alliance representative; Katherine Howard Foundation; Community & Voluntary sector; representatives from services supporting the Traveller Community and migrant groups; and Tusla (PPFS, CYPSC, Social Work).

The Advisory Group meets on a quarterly basis, and its terms of reference include the following:

- To support the planning and implementation of a national approach to home visiting services.
- To contribute to the strategic direction of the programme.
- Promote and contribute to research, evaluation, and reporting work.
- To support action learning within the delivery of the project with partner agencies and promote opportunities to share practice and learning on an ongoing basis.

#### 4. What is the National Home Visiting Programme Trying to Achieve:

There are six core objectives for the Programme. These are:



## 5. Stakeholders:

Stakeholders with the National Home Visiting Programme include the following:

- Department of Children, Disability and Equality and other government departments
- HSE (Public Health Nursing, Healthy Child Programme, Maternity Services)
- Tusla PPFS Senior Managers, Tusla Commissioning Managers and CYPSC
- Home Visiting Programmes both in existence and recently established through the Children's Fund
- Home Visiting Alliance
- Community & Voluntary organisations

## 5.Challenges:

Home visiting services have developed in an ad hoc manner, driven by local needs, resources and priorities, rather than informed by a national approach. At present some areas of the country have no home visiting programme available, while other areas provide universal access or targeted access to a home visiting programme. This was noted in the 'National Review of Home Visiting' (DCEDIY, 2024), including the fragmentation of Home Visting, with fewer services outside of Leinster. Funding via the Children's Fund will be made available for a period of 5 years to support the development of a consistent approach to the delivery of home visiting services, allowing for an increased number of children and families to benefit from such a service. The demand for this programme considerably outweighs its capacity. Understanding the current funding structures for Home Visiting will be important to leverage opportunities for funding from other funding sources.

The degree of variability for the professional development and conditions for Home Visitors in their role was highlighted in the 'National Review of Home Visiting' (DCEDIY, 2024) with two thirds of respondents to the national survey identifying that their role responsibilities were not compensated adequately in their salaries. This was further developed in focus groups and individual interviews, highlighting how structural issues and the complexity of the work compound this issue.

'The National Review of Home Visiting' (DCEDIY, 2024) identified how evaluations across the sector suggest that families benefit from Home Visiting, though only a few of the Programmes have had rigorous research or evaluation in Ireland. Indeed, the lack of standardized measures was identified as a challenge, with the evidence base limited, such as the use of observational studies with no comparison to other groups. The National Review also highlighted how there was an absence of evidence on the effects of the programme for different groups, and patterns of engagement. Increasing the evidence base of the impact of Home Visiting in a five-year programme, especially in the area of child outcomes, will be a challenge.

Programmes data systems vary considerably, depending on the data sought by the Programme, and the host organisation's data priorities and system capacity. The National Home Visiting Programme involves five core programme models delivered across 42 service sites. To ensure effective governance, accountability, and sustainability, the National Home Visiting Programme must put in place a data management solution that enables secure, consistent, and scalable data collection, storage, and analysis.

## 6. Guiding Principles

The National Home Visiting Programme is based on the values of Tusla as a people-centred organisation. The values of Tusla inform the principles of the National Home Visiting Programme.



Principles of the National Home Visiting Programme include:

- ✚ Antenatal to five years is the most critical period in a child's life, setting out the foundations for their development into adult life. Increasingly research indicates that the right support at the right time supports parent-child bonding, infant well-being and improved school readiness.
- ✚ This is a prevention and early intervention approach. All home visiting programmes are offered to parents as a supportive intervention, with the parents themselves determining if this would be of benefit to them. It is entirely voluntary, parental agreement to participate is essential.
- ✚ Home visiting programmes connect parents with a Home Visitor who guides them through the early stages of raising a family. The development of a trusted relationship between the home visitor and the parents is the core foundation on which the programme activities are built upon.
- ✚ Home Visiting Programmes champion the principle of the best interests of the child being of paramount importance.
- ✚ Partnership and collaboration throughout that sees the parents as experts, and primary teachers to their children in their first learning environment of their home.
- ✚ The Home Visiting Programme seeks to promote parents' confidence and competence in a strength-based manner.
- ✚ The Programme is committed to championing best practice in Home Visiting, with evidence-based models and practice explored and shared.
- ✚ Integration across community supports that champion parents and children connected within their community, with the Home Visitor bridges to support for those who need it.

## 7. Conclusion

This Strategy has outlined the principles and core objectives of the National Home Visiting Programme, and the governance structures and stakeholders who will be engaged for the Programme to meet its objectives. The challenges set out the landscape in which the Programme has been developed. The core objectives of the Programme provide a vision for the Programme to move forward over the next 5 years to inform the future development of a sustainable national home visiting service.

Please see the strategic objectives below with activities by the National Home Visiting Programme to meet these objectives.



<b>Increasing Availability &amp; Accessibility of evidence-based home visiting services nationwide</b>		
<b>1</b>	Supporting Implementation of new Home Visiting services funded through the Children's Fund	The National Programme for Home Visiting will support the implementation of new Home Visiting Services through engagement with each Service individually with implementation visits in 2025; establishment of a forum for the Home Visiting Services with Tusla PPFS management; supported by the development of a framework and guidance for local implementation facilitated in the Advisory Group for Home Visiting
<b>2</b>	Facilitating further development of new or expanded Home Visiting Services in 2025	The revised application process to be devised with Expression of Interest process held in Quarter 1 2025 with approval by the Governance Group for development of new home visiting services.
<b>3</b>	Engagement with national organisations that champion support for lone parents and parents from the Traveller community on opportunities to promote accessibility of the home visiting services for lone parents and Traveller parents	Engagement with national organisations championing the needs of lone parents and parents from the Traveller community to promote availability and accessibility of the home visiting services, with focus on local implementation, through local implementation visits and dialogue in forum for Home Visiting Services.

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<b>Ensure integration of home visiting within all community supports available to parents</b>		
<b>1</b>	Promote integration of home visiting through national structures in Tusla and with external stakeholders	Collaboration with National HSE leads on integration between HSE, Tusla and home visiting services, with activities both in local implementation support and forum for home visiting to champion integration.
<b>2</b>	Connectivity with National Tusla and DCEDIY Supporting Parents strategy	Collaboration with National Parenting Lead regarding integration of home visiting with activities of the Supporting Parents Strategy in Tusla and DCEDIY.

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<b>Improve availability of measurable, disaggregated data to ensure that those who will benefit most are offered and can access home visiting services</b>		
1	Development of framework for data collection from Children's Fund Home Visiting services	<p>Establishment of a Data Working Group to support the development of framework for data collection from Children's Fund Home Visiting services, with activities to develop recommendations on the following:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Data input, preparation &amp; Collection.</li> <li>2. Data Processing</li> <li>3. Standards of Practice</li> <li>4. Data Output &amp; Interpretation</li> <li>5. Data Storage</li> <li>6. Communication plan for keeping stakeholders informed about progress</li> </ol> <p>These recommendations will be presented to the Governance Group for approval and agreement on local implementation.</p>
2	Development of quarterly returns of data	Development of quarterly returns of data, including financial returns; data regarding referrals as recommended by data working group and approved by governance group; and activity data as recommended by data working group and approved by governance group.

<b>Establish appropriate recommended pathways, standards and role requirements for home visitors</b>		
1	Work force Development	<p>Co-ordination of relevant training to Children's Fund Home Visiting Sites to support local implementation.</p> <p>Survey of Parent Support Champions regarding Home Visiting professional development and training.</p>
3	Standards of Practice	Initial scoping in Advisory Group on the development of standards of practice for provision of home visiting.

<b>Develop a consistent approach to data collection across all Home Visiting services nationally</b>		
1	Consistent Data from Home Visiting Services funded by Children's Fund	Leading & facilitating the quarterly collection of consistent data from Home Visiting Services funded by the Children's Fund.
2	Participant Experience from Home Visiting Services funded by Children's Fund	Establish a process to gather and share participants experience of implementation to inform the development of best practice in the provision of home visiting.
3	Collaboration with Home Visiting Alliance on What Works Evidence Study on Data and Outcome Framework for home visiting	Collaboration with Home Visiting Alliance What works Evidence Study, including implementation learning in development of data and implementation in National Home Visiting Programme.
4	Aligning best practice in data collection with other key Initiatives	Collaboration with HSE, ABC Outcomes Framework, Tusla Outcomes Framework on best practice
5	Year-end report	Review by year end of data collection within home visiting services, and alignment with home visiting programmes, to identify priorities for 2026

<b>Develop an increased evidence base to inform the development of additional home visiting services, including the relative effectiveness of existing programmes and the criteria and conditions for their success</b>		
1	Future funding opportunities for development of home visiting	Production of data and evidence of need for development of new home visiting services should future funding become available
2	Engagement with Academics & Research to strengthen research & evaluation lens throughout Home Visiting Programme	Connectivity with academics to consider opportunities for action learning with Children's Fund Home Visiting services, to bring a research and evaluation lens into the Programme, to champion evidence gathering of effectiveness of the home visiting programmes, what works, how does it work and for whom does it work.
3	Presentation of Data, Implementation Learning & Evaluation exercises to inform development of additional home visiting services	Year-end report on data collection, implementation learning and exercises to inform development to identify priorities for the programme in 2026