

June 2020

# HELP ME GROW NATIONAL CENTER

Using Help Me Grow to Support  
Families Through COVID-19



# Introduction

Events precipitated by the novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) have presented some of the most uncertain times our nation has faced, and the implications of COVID-19 will continue to evolve in unforeseeable ways for months and possibly years to come.

Despite this, the Help Me Grow (HMG) National Center is both comforted and emboldened to know that efforts by the National Affiliate Network have always been dedicated to promoting the health, well-being, and fortitude of families in communities all across our country. Affiliates have stood alongside families with young children long before this public health emergency. In the face of this challenge, we are inspired to witness affiliates nimbly and skillfully adjusting the playbook to double down on this unwavering commitment to families, even in the face of great disruption and insecurity.

Each and every one of us is affected as the COVID-19 pandemic proliferates across the nation, but sadly, the most vulnerable among us are hardest hit by the consequences of the virus itself, as well as by the ancillary effects of the policies put in place to address it. The HMG National Center has seen and heard from affiliates across the country who are nimbly leveraging the infrastructure offered by implementation of the Model to meet new needs and concerns of families in innovative ways.

In addition to following and learning from the adaptations of affiliates, the HMG National Center has experienced its own shift in the ways it is engaging with funders and key partners to ensure our efforts intersect in an impactful way with current events. Over the past several months, the HMG National Center received support from both the J.B. and M.K Pritzker Family Foundation and The JPB Foundation to amplify our capacity to respond to the impact of the pandemic on children and families.

- With support from the latter, the National Center and more than ten local HMG affiliate communities will partner with key family support agencies such as WIC to ensure distribution of emergency relief resources (diapers, formula, etc.) to families most in need. Such an initiative leverages the key role that HMG systems play in connecting directly with families, assessing need, and linking to beneficial services and supports.
- The J.B. and M.K. Pritzker Family Foundation grant created an opportunity to partner with Spring Impact to identify, operationalize, and elevate several promising best practices in emergency response actualized by HMG affiliate communities. Such strategies include proactive outreach to families, rapidly assessing how the community service landscape had changed for families in terms of in-person visits, hours, accessibility, etc., and expanding the role of the HMG Centralized Access Point to provide augmented capacity around basic need requests, domestic violence concerns, and other emerging priorities for families impacted by COVID-19 and associated social distancing measures.

The HMG National Center recognizes the critical window in which to ensure we both articulate the utility of the HMG Model during this time, as well as make visible some of the notable ways affiliates have sought to support families. This brief seeks to do just that, by describing seven key elements of the HMG Model that affiliates have been able to leverage as mechanisms to support families impacted by COVID-19 and highlighting the innovative ways in which affiliates across the National Affiliate Network are utilizing their established HMG infrastructure to mobilize an efficient, powerful response on behalf of families across the country.

# 7 Model Elements to Support Families' Needs

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# Ensuring Equity Through Targeted Universalism

COVID-19 is impacting all members of our communities, but disproportionately so. Families that were already in the most vulnerable circumstances prior to the pandemic have been hit hardest. More often than not, these are families of lower socio-economic status and families of color, who historically do not have equitable access to resources for their families to thrive in the same ways as their more affluent, white counterparts. The HMG Model advances equity of access for all families by applying an approach of targeted universalism, which serves to promote universal outcomes through targeted strategies. HMG is universally available to all children, including those families who may have concerns or simply want to learn more about their child's development. Through its targeted approach, HMG enables a focus on the linkage of vulnerable children who are at risk for developmental and behavioral challenges to community-based services that will support their optimal health and well-being. HMG affiliates are able to leverage the HMG Model's targeted universal approach to support all families, and especially those disproportionately affected by the impacts of COVID-19 itself as well as the associated policies and practices enacted to respond to the crisis.





# Promising Practice from HMG Washington

In Washington State, both the immediate and longer-term response planning to address the COVID-19 crisis rely on collective HMG leadership and an approach to embed equity in **Help Me Grow Washington** efforts through an integrated state and community leadership model. The collaborative leadership structure utilized by HMG Washington is demonstrating value in developing longer-term strategies to expand and improve both virtual and in-person service delivery to meet basic needs and provide concrete supports to families in the state.



As funding opportunities arose to support communities across Washington and invest in needed infrastructure, HMG champions were able to illustrate the power of an established, interconnected resource grid. At the community level, HMG networks were poised to respond to emergent needs such as providing diapers, food, and safety supplies within childcare centers. At the state level, existing efforts to build an interconnected community information exchange to serve families across the lifespan were bolstered and HMG was incorporated in this new resource platform design, which will advance efforts to take the onus off families to navigate or track down these resources.

As planning and response investment continues, the HMG Washington commitment to embed equity in the HMG framework remains strong. A statewide HMG Leadership Council plan has emerged that will include an Equity Committee, an equity commitment statement and guiding principles that have already been developed, and strategies to engage families and communities of color, some of which have already been implemented at various stages of local and statewide expansion.

# Connecting to Families Through Outreach Efforts

COVID-19 is impacting families everywhere and many are facing unprecedented health and financial strain. In response, states and communities across the country are galvanizing to support struggling families. There is a great need to ensure that families have access to information on COVID-19 and the resources available to help mitigate its impact. The HMG Model and affiliates implementing it across the country specialize in the development and support of systematic, intentional strategies to connect directly with families in order to provide useful information on existing supports and services. In this time of crisis due to COVID-19, HMG affiliates are leveraging active outreach efforts and existing partnerships with critical community-based organizations in order to reach families throughout the community who are in distress and in need of support.



# Promising Practice from HMG Utah



In this uncertain time, **Help Me Grow Utah** found that families were looking for ways to connect with others, opportunities to discuss what they were experiencing, as well as activities and resources to get through this challenging time. In response to these needs, the HMG Utah team started a weekly virtual parent group, with the intention of giving parents "face to face" contact with other families across the state and an opportunity to share resources and ideas. The group features a new discussion topic each week and is facilitated by HMG Utah child development specialists. This weekly group now has a core set of families that attend and are growing close to each other, in addition to new parents joining weekly to discuss the topics of interest to them.

In addition to this effort, HMG Utah began posting more regularly on social media, specifically focusing on sharing a daily activity as an Instagram story. These posts have been very well received and are often shared by parents and partners.





# Maintaining a Comprehensive, Up-To-Date Resource Directory

COVID-19 is impacting the array of services available to children and families. Community-based organizations may be operating on limited hours with fewer personnel, they may have closed, or they may have shifted their service offerings. In addition to COVID-influenced reductions in capacity, communities are seeing new, novel, and grassroots efforts spring up to fill in gaps and meet families' emerging needs. HMG affiliates have always committed to maintaining a comprehensive, accurate, up-to-date resource directory of all available supports and services for families in their communities. Affiliates are currently leveraging that critical resource and the processes they have instituted to maintain it at a time of both accelerated change to the service landscape and unprecedented need among families.





# Promising Practice from HMG Alaska

When the initial “Hunker Down” orders started in Alaska, the **Help Me Grow Alaska** staff worked to identify what was needed most by families in such unique and confusing times. Feedback from clients, as well as experiences with their own families, suggested to HMG Alaska leaders that the greatest need in the early days lied in locating trusted information on an internet full of resources. Recognizing the need for clear, concise, and trusted information, HMG Alaska compiled a resource list that could be sent directly to families or redistributed by partners. The resource compilation includes the following pages: In-State Resources, National Support/Hotlines, Talking with Kids about COVID-19, Managing Mental Health for Children & Families, and Parenting Resources & Activities for Kids.



At the same time HMG Alaska conducted callbacks to check in with current and former clients, continued standard call center operations, and pivoted to adapt outreach work, HMG Alaska continued ongoing resource documentation in its permanent database. The HMG Alaska resource database is a shared project with multiple community agencies that works to create a centralized place for resources to be searched and documented. Utilizing a co-governed hub-and-spoke model overseen by a core group of organizations, the HMG Alaska resource database is an example of powerful cross-sector collaboration. A next phase for the database includes plans to allow access for community organizations to view and edit resources, as well as direct consumer access through a website.

# Linking Families to Community-Based Services

COVID-19 is impacting the number of families who find themselves in need of community-based supports and services. At the same time, the crisis is hindering the capacity of community-based organizations and even their ability to remain solvent and sustain operations. The role of HMG in linking families to the appropriate existing resources in their communities has arguably never been more critical. While there are oftentimes other call centers providing information and referral, HMG is differentiated in its existing targeted commitment to families with young children, in its provision of comprehensive follow-up to families, and through its systematic feedback loop to partner with children's medical homes to ensure a holistic approach to supporting families. The HMG Model's collaborative nature serves to establish an efficient, connected early childhood system that best supports families. This inherently enables HMG to accelerate partnerships that can meet the emerging needs of families during this crisis. These characterizing elements of the Model, paired with the extensive experience of HMG affiliates, are essential in helping the incredible influx of families in need due to COVID.



# Promising Practices from HMG Onondaga, NY & Long Island, NY



**Help Me Grow Onondaga** has leveraged the unusual circumstances precipitated by the COVID-19 pandemic as an opportunity to explore new partnerships with home visitors to advance awareness of developmental milestones and developmental screening among parents of young children. With parents and children at home together and home visiting being conducted virtually, it is an ideal time for parents to “check-in” on their child’s health and development through developmental screening.

In a new partnership with Catholic Charities of Onondaga County, HMG Onondaga staff are working hand-in-hand with home visitors to conduct developmental screens utilizing the Ages & Stages Questionnaire (ASQ-3). Catholic Charities home visitors virtually connect with their families to assist in completing the developmental screen. Working together, HMG and the home visitor share the results of the ASQ-3 with parents. Most importantly, HMG staff support home visitors in making appropriate referrals and linkages to supports in response to the screening results. HMG Onondaga assists home visitors in connecting families to basic needs, available childcare and other early learning programs, in-home learning activities, and additional community resources. This new home visiting partnership utilizes HMG’s strength in connecting families to community resources and providing families with activities to support continued development and learning within the home.

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The **Help Me Grow Long Island** partnership is primed to serve families during the COVID-19 pandemic. Prior to COVID-19, 30% of families connected with HMG Long Island for help accessing basic needs, and the affiliate had a robust referral network in place to meet these needs. Although availability of services changed drastically at the beginning of the pandemic, HMG Long Island has been able to leverage established partnerships with agencies that are continuing to serve families with baby items and food, allowing HMG Long Island to handle intakes and identify families for whom these partners would deliver emergency drop-offs. Additionally, HMG Long Island had already been utilizing web-based platforms for phone, text, fax, and data management systems, allowing for a smooth transition to remote work. In the ten weeks of New York’s economic shutdown, HMG Long Island served 350 families, 93% of whom needed basics like diapers and formula for their young children after having lost their jobs. In addition to connecting 98.9% of these families to desired services, HMG Long Island is providing information about promoting child development during a developmentally fragile period of family stress.

# Providing Ongoing Support to Families

COVID-19 is impacting the health, well-being, financial stability of families in communities all across the country. While each and every family is affected, it is the most vulnerable who are hardest hit by the consequences of the virus, as well as by the ancillary effects of the policies put in place to address it. In addition to vulnerable families who may have had to access assistance in the past, many families struggling with the challenging realities introduced by COVID-19 have never before had to navigate the complex landscape of services and supports. Not only are HMG affiliates experts in linking families to the most suitable local programs, HMG systems offer a vital service in continuing to provide ongoing support to families in order to ensure needs are met fully. HMG systems across the country are able to supply families dealing with unprecedented crisis through critical service continuity, maintaining connection, and remaining as a supportive partner as long as a family chooses.





# Promising Practices from HMG District of Columbia



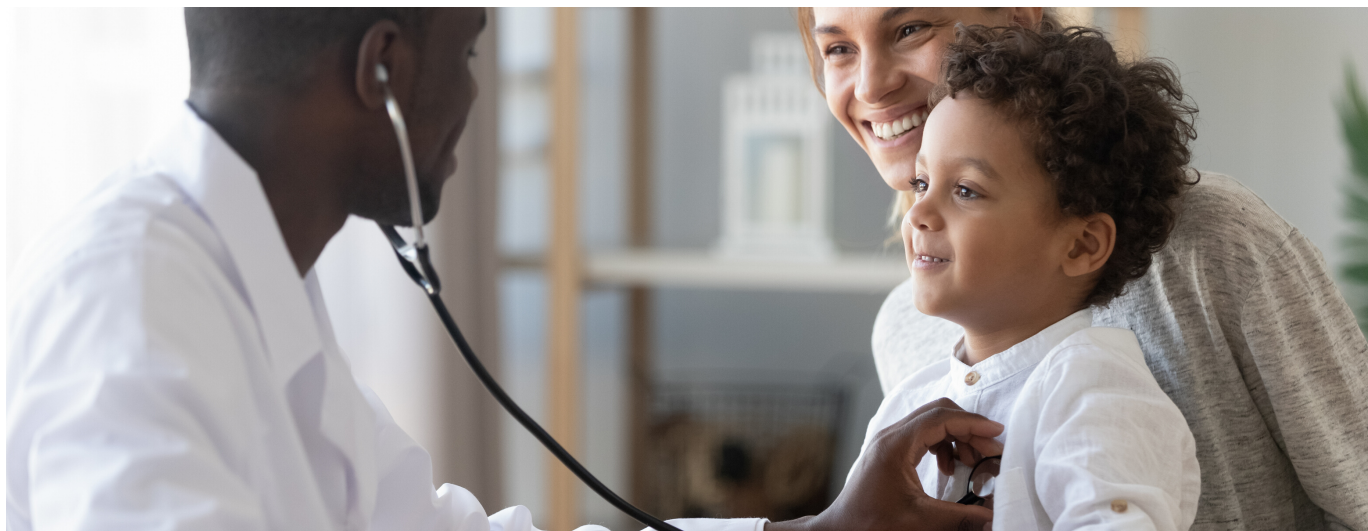
COVID-19 has driven an increased need for basic needs such as food and baby supplies among families and children in the District of Columbia, and the crisis has also precipitated a spike in reports of domestic violence, as indicated by data shared among key organizational partners. **Help Me Grow DC** realized an opportunity to leverage its Centralized Access Point infrastructure in order to support families experiencing violence and abuse in this time of crisis. As such, HMG DC has stepped into a supportive role in providing awareness, concern, care coordination, referral, and data tracking of this particular issue, based on a tri-fold agenda:

- Utilize HMG DC's approach as a “**neutral-convener**” of messaging throughout the Wards of the District – stressing the importance of advertising phone numbers and partner shelter supports tied to its immediate network.
- Work with HMG DC's existing “**frontline partners**” representing key sectors involved in the early childhood system, including home visiting, maternal health, early learning and education, and Georgetown University Hospital, which is promoting opportunities for coordinated telehealth and behavioral health appointments.
- Increased HMG Care Coordination focused on domestic violence supports within the District. Care Coordinators “**discreetly inquire**” with all callers regarding needs relative to daily interactions at home and conduct supplemental welfare checks with those seeking HMG DC services.

HMG DC is maintaining confidential data with regards to the number of domestic violence-related calls handled during COVID-19 and is advertising itself as a primary resource for victims experiencing distress during this time. In addition, HMG DC is working to provide information in a supportive manner on a dedicated coronavirus website, sponsored by DC Health.

# Partnering with Physicians Through Systematic Feedback Loops

COVID-19 is impacting the work of child health care providers. Implications of social distancing policies have kept some families from routine well child visits, and changes in policy, increased use of telemedicine, emerging reimbursement strategies, and extraordinary needs of young children and their families all present an unprecedented landscape for physicians to navigate. While more patient families have increased needs that may be met by community-based services, child health providers are hard-pressed to keep comprehensive and updated information on community-facing services and ensuring connection to those programs is time-consuming. In implementing the HMG Model, affiliates across the country have institutionalized a mechanism to funnel information essential to the holistic care of families with young children back to their medical provider. HMG systems are in an auspicious position to leverage their expertise in ensuring feedback loops to child health providers around the well-being of families in the context of COVID-19, when the medical home is spread the thinnest and need amongst families is greatest.



# Promising Practices from HMG San Diego, California



In San Diego County, **First 5 San Diego** has partnered with the local chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP-CA3) to serve as the countywide coordinator of the Healthy Development Services program. AAP-CA3 works closely with both First 5 San Diego as well as the six service providers throughout the large county who are contracted to serve clients. With the announcement of the stay-at-home order, AAP-CA3 immediately organized weekly virtual meetings to support the contractors' transition to telehealth services, which included the modification of existing tools to support virtual services, training for staff on video platforms, and discussions on ways to ensure the safety of protected health information. The trainings provided to staff also included routines-based intervention, ongoing functional assessment, and coaching. AAP-CA3 has provided technical assistance and training to regions on how to support parent readiness for telehealth services, virtual consent and a refresher on motivational interviewing. Throughout the process, AAP-CA3 noted that the pandemic was difficult on everyone, not just on clients, but also for the staff, which is why they developed a weekly training titled, "Supporting Providers: Relationships, Routine, and Regulation" to address stressors felt by the providers. In collaboration with the AAP-CA3, First 5 San Diego is leading the way in innovation and expansion of services to better serve families.



# Leveraging Technology to Sustain Support for Families

COVID-19 is affecting our ability to come together in person safely. As such, affiliates have shifted and evolved HMG activities as necessary to assist providers in continuing their critical work to support families during this difficult time. Technology has allowed HMG operations to persist despite the challenges imposed by the pandemic through adaptation and innovation. Affiliates from across the National Affiliate Network are leveraging technology platforms and apps to conduct family and community outreach efforts, educate families about child health and development, and conduct developmental screenings. Affiliates' ability to stay connected to existing HMG families and connect with new families is essential for ensuring families' critical needs are met during this time of crisis.





# Promising Practices from HMG Oregon



Quickly pivoting to support families in a remote environment, **Help Me Grow Oregon** and the Swindells Center mobilized a seven-point action plan to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. The community response has been positive, as evidenced by record attendance at parenting classes, requests for information from new locations not previously served, and strengthened collaboration with community partner organizations. Going forward, HMG Oregon will continue to offer virtual opportunities for learning and support.

The new components of HMG Oregon's virtual mobilization include:

- **Tip Sheets:** Curated lists of resources and actionable steps parents can take to solve new challenges with their children.
- **Video Vignettes:** Short videos from pediatric experts providing tips, tools or activities.
- **Recorded Trainings:** Videos/webinars that families can access on their own schedule on topics like challenging behaviors in the home and building resiliency during challenging times.
- **Learning Care Packages:** Age-appropriate, play-based kits with activity suggestions that support all domains of development, as well as guidance for the parents on how to extend the activities through short videos (available in English and Spanish)

Individualized family support continues through stay-at-home orders via phone, email, and video calls. Facilitated online playgroups are the final piece of the HMG Oregon virtual COVID-19 response to launch, which are intended to support families with medically complex and/or very young children in accessing support groups while staying safe.

# Conclusion

The Help Me Grow Model has demonstrated its powerful viability as a mechanism to support families affected by COVID-19, and in doing so, has displayed significant capacity as a key resource in helping families through times of great crisis. The HMG National Center and Affiliate Network have established a wide array of ways in which the Core Components and Key Activities of the Model can be leveraged and quickly pivot to meet increasing and evolving needs of families impacted by crisis.

Economic analysis and forecasts agree, the economic implications of COVID-19 are likely to be lasting, formidable, and impact the wellbeing of families for possibly years to come. HMG affiliates that have innovated and transformed their work to leverage Model infrastructure as a support to families hit by COVID-19 will likely continue some or all of their new and novel approaches to sustain critical support to families struggling from the ripple effects of this crisis in the long-term.

The HMG National Center and Affiliate Network continue forward alongside families, persisting in the identification and implementation of strategies to promote the wellbeing of communities in the context of a COVID-altered world. Together, there is a broad and bright collective opportunity in bridging the exploration, ideas, and efforts developed to mitigate the impacts of crisis on families and evolve to meet new and expanded needs in a post-pandemic America.



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