



Skill Mix in Health Visiting

Skill mix teams are used within health visiting services to enable health visitors to fulfil their main purpose - to create good health through a universal service that addresses the needs of individuals, families and communities. Approaches focus on strengths and account for situations that shape human life.

Skill Mix Defined

A combination of staff and skills within a health visiting team who work together to optimise health outcomes.



The way health visiting services are organised and delivered affects how likely they are to succeed. Processes of delegation, supervision and reporting are needed to safely manage workloads in skill mix teams. Health visitors retain responsibility for activities delegated to non-health visitor team members and are accountable for each decision to delegate. Safe and effective skill mix is underpinned by three interacting factors: accountability; balanced service system; care based on people's needs.

A Health visitor Accountability

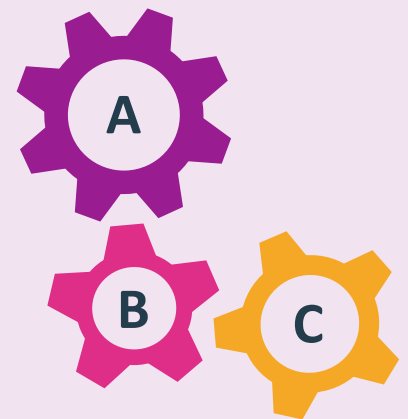
- Early action to reduce risks and prevent harm as part of 'safety critical' practice
- Know and understand individual family needs and the situation for service provision
- Know the competence and skills sets of team members
- Appropriate delegation of specific activities to practitioners with the right skills, at the right time, in the right place
- Supervision, review and learning for continual service improvement
- Review cases and monitor to ensure care meets required standards

B Balanced service system

- Deliver national and local policy for health visiting, through a universal service, with support proportionate to need
- Clear policies and procedures that take account of the dynamic and complex nature of families and communities
- Integrated pathways that detail the contribution and wider system benefit of an operational health visiting service
- Demand-driven workforce modelling to maximise the workforce resource and inform workforce planning
- Support for health visitor decision making on service provision tailored to needs
- Clear role differentiation for team members - matched to care provision based on individual's knowledge, skills and competence
- Integrated communication strategies and processes for information sharing

C Care based on people's need

- Home visits where parents and health visitor jointly review family strengths and needs, establish priorities, and develop an action plan
- Practitioners with the right skills, available at the right time and place
- Relationship with a 'trusted practitioner' using culturally sensitive person-centred approaches
- Babies and vulnerable people to be 'kept in mind' and accounted for by services



Evidence Informing Skill Mix in Health Visiting

The infographic has been prepared as an aid for those designing and developing skill mix workforce models for health visiting service provision. It offers an ABC of factors important to skill mix in health visiting that has been informed by existing knowledge regarding: the needs of families, successful health visiting practice, and skill mix in healthcare provision.

The evidence for what families want from services has been captured by Channel Mum research and published by the iHV¹. This complements other empirical work reporting parents' service experiences which note relationship-based work as critical to achieving benefits for families^{2,3&4}.

Evidence for what contributes to successful health visiting practice is derived from the large body of research collated by the Why Health Visiting research programme^{5,6&7}. This body of work evidences the purpose of health visiting and ways in which the service can be offered. The iHV 2019⁸ Vision for the Future builds on this further, bringing together parents' voices with evidence to support 15 high impact areas for health visiting practice.

The use of skill mixed teams in health visiting is now commonplace across the UK⁹. However, research examining how teams operate and achieve outcomes, remains sparse. Transferable messages on using skill mix can be derived from healthcare generally^{10&11}, hospital nursing^{12&13} and general practice^{14&15}, as well as guidance for continuity of care¹⁶ and safe staffing¹⁷ in the NHS.

The ABC of Skill Mix

The ABC abbreviation summarises factors important to using skill mix in health visiting.

Accountability for delegated activities and safe practice.

Balanced service system with policies and protocols that aid practitioner autonomy, decision making and flexible action.

Care based on people's needs, demonstrating approaches that are person-centred and based on evidence to achieve service consistency and continuity.

¹Morton, A. (2020). What do parents want from a health visiting service. iHV <http://bit.ly/36EoLIq>

²Donetto, S., Malone, M., Hughes, J., Morrow, E., Cowley, S. & Maben, J. (2013). Health visiting: the voice of service users. London: National Nursing Research Unit, King's College London. <https://bit.ly/3wOGiO6>

³Rautio, S. (2013). Parents' experiences of early support. Scandinavian Journal of Caring Sciences, 27(4), 927-934.

⁴Bäckström, C., Thorstensson, S., Pihlblad, J., et al., Larsson, M. (2021). Parents' experiences of receiving professional support through extended home visits during pregnancy and early Childhood- A phenomenographic study. Frontiers in Public Health, 9(578917),1-13.

⁵Cowley S, Whittaker K A, Malone M, et al., Maben J (2015). Why health visiting? Examining the potential public health benefits from health visiting practice within a universal service: a narrative review of the literature. International Journal of Nursing Studies. 52(1):465-80. doi: 10.1016/j.ijnurstu.2014.07.013

⁶Cowley, S., Whittaker, K., Malone, M., et al., Maben J. (2018a). What makes health visiting successful – or not? Part 1. Universality. Journal of Health Visiting, 6(7):352-360. doi.org/10.12968/johv.2018.6.7.352

⁷Cowley, S., Malone, M., Whittaker, K. et al., Maben J. (2018b). What makes health visiting successful – or not? Part 2. The service journey. Journal of Health Visiting, 6(8):404-412. doi.org/10.12968/johv.2018.6.8.404

⁸iHV (2019). A Vision for the Future. Available at: <https://ihv.org.uk/our-work/our-vision/>

⁹Whittaker, K., Appleton, J.V., Peckover, S., Adams, C. (2021). Organising health visiting services in the UK: Frontline perspectives. Journal of Health Visiting. 9:2, 68-75. doi.org/10.12968/johv.2021.9.2.68

¹⁰Dubois, C.A., Dingham, S. (2009). From staff-mix to skill-mix and beyond: towards a systematic approach to health workforce management. Human Resources for Health. 7:87. doi:10.1186/1478-4491-7-87

¹¹Maier, C.B., Kroezen, M., Busse, R., Wismar, M. eds (2022). Skill-mix Innovation, Effectiveness and Implementation. Euro Observatory on Health Systems and Policies. Cambridge University Press. Cambridge. doi:10.1017/9781009031929

¹²Leary A, Cook R, Jones S, et al., Radford, M. (2016). Mining routinely collected acute data to reveal non-linear relationships between nurse staffing levels and outcomes. BMJ Open, 6(12), e011177. doi:10.1136/bmjopen-2016-011177

¹³Dall'Ora C, Saville C, Rubbo B, et al., Griffiths P. (2022). Nurse staffing levels and patient outcomes: A systematic review of longitudinal studies. International Journal of Nursing Studies. 134:104311. doi: 10.1016/j.ijnurstu.2022.104311.

¹⁴Nelson, P. A., Bradley, F., Martindale, A., McBride, A., & Hodgson, D. (2019). Skill-mix change in general practice: A qualitative comparison of three 'new' non-medical roles in English primary care. Br J Gen Pract, 69(684), e489. doi:10.3399/bjgp19X704117

¹⁵Spooner, S., McDermott, I., Goff, M., et al., Checkland, K. (2022). Processes supporting effective skill-mix implementation in general practice: A qualitative study. J Health Serv Res Policy, 27(4): doi:10.1177/13558196221091356

¹⁶PHE (2021). Care continuity between midwifery and health visiting services: principles for practice. Available at: <https://bit.ly/3EB9Oey>

¹⁷NHS & National Quality Board. (2016). Supporting NHS providers to deliver the right staff, with the right skills. in: The right place at the right time: Safe, sustainable and productive staffing. UK: Available at: <https://bit.ly/3X89gDV>