

# Help infants and toddlers with delays and disabilities thrive.



For young children with developmental delays or disabilities, Early Childhood Intervention greatly improves success rates in school and later in life.

Children born with a disability or a delay in their development can start out at a disadvantage that lasts into their school years and beyond. However, numerous studies have shown that these children can catch up with their peers and even erase early setbacks with targeted help early in life. In Texas, some children under age three with disabilities and developmental delays receive services that improve their health and their physical, social, emotional, language, and cognitive development through a family-centered system called Early Childhood Intervention (ECI). Unfortunately, due to state budget cuts in 2011, thousands of young children in Texas are missing out on receiving these services, crucial to their development and growth.

## What to Know:

- **ECI services work:** Roughly three out of four children who receive Texas ECI services make impressive gains, with increases in rates of growth and changes in development beyond what would be expected without intervention.<sup>1, 2</sup> Studies show that societies that invest early in infants and toddlers have better health outcomes and lower levels of health inequality.<sup>3</sup>
- **One key to ECI's effectiveness is its family-centered model.** ECI providers visit children in their natural environment, such as in their home or child care setting, and work with families to create a care plan that addresses children's specific needs.<sup>4</sup> ECI providers give parents tools and practical, routine exercises that empower the family to improve the child's development between ECI provider visits. This approach allows families to develop strategies to improve outcomes for their children<sup>5</sup> and adjusts the cost of care to what families can afford to pay.<sup>6</sup>
- As the child population has grown, so has the number of Texas children needing services,<sup>7</sup> yet **Texas' Early Childhood Intervention system met a 14% budget cut** in the 2012-2013 fiscal year. The legislature allocated for thousands fewer babies and toddlers with developmental delays and disabilities to receive services.<sup>8, 9</sup> Stricter eligibility requirements that went into effect in September of 2011 prevent many young children from receiving services and supports that would greatly improve their chances of overcoming a developmental delay or disability.<sup>10</sup>
- Among the young children who continue to qualify for ECI services, many won't receive the level of services optimal for impact. Although children in other states receive as many as 10 ECI hours per month,<sup>11</sup> children enrolled in ECI here, on average, receive fewer than three hours of service per month, meaning many **Texas babies and toddlers get below the expert-recommended minimum** of four hours.<sup>12</sup>
- Failure to invest in a strong and sustainable ECI system has widespread ramifications for children, families, schools, and society. **ECI is a vital community support** for parents of premature infants and pediatricians, child care providers, and others who work with families and refer parents to ECI when they suspect developmental delays, find indicators of autism, or perceive social and emotional concerns.
- When children don't receive early intervention, the alternative isn't an absence of intervention—it's late intervention. As children enter public systems with greater delays and more severe problems, **their challenges grow more difficult and costly to treat over time.**<sup>13</sup> A weakened Texas ECI system leaves other systems, such as special education and

specialized medical care, to deal with unaddressed problems, as those challenges become more entrenched and more difficult and expensive to treat.

## How to Make it Happen

- **Fund ECI to meet the need:** Providing more young children with services to change their developmental trajectory, during a period in their development when they are most receptive to intervention, begins with providing adequate funding. Texas recently made it more difficult for children to qualify for ECI, so the remaining infants and toddlers served are those with the most acute needs. These kids need to get the right level of service, and ECI funding should be set to match the need for every child who needs services.
- **Protect a family-focused approach to helping kids:** Providing the level of services known to have the most impact for young children with developmental delays and disabilities will require more than the current average of less than three hours per month of contact between families and ECI providers.

Learn more about this strategy at <http://txchildren.org/ECI>

## Thinking About Costs

When young children do not receive needed developmental services, the alternative is later intervention, often made through schools or the child welfare or juvenile justice systems. These interventions not only cost more, but they also prove less effective. Later in life, children's developmental delays and disabilities are far more difficult and expensive to treat.

Economists have found that services provided in early childhood "decrease grade repetition, reduce special education spending, enhance productivity, lower welfare costs, increase tax revenues, and lower juvenile justice costs." As a result, the cost-benefit ratio for high-quality early childhood development programs ranges from 2.5:1 to 4:1.

## Sources



### Thinking about Costs

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