
Early Childhood Intervention Advocacy Coalition 2023 Legislative Agenda

Continue Restoring Funding for Early Childhood Intervention (ECI) for Toddlers with Disabilities

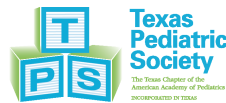
December 2022

Texas ECI Is Highly Effective for Infants and Toddlers With Disabilities

Early Childhood Intervention (ECI) is a federal-state program that contracts with community organizations to provide life-changing therapies and services to babies and toddlers with autism, Down syndrome, and other disabilities and developmental delays. Working with caregivers, ECI helps children learn to walk, communicate with their families, and meet other developmental goals – reducing the need for costly special education services, and help children develop independent living skills in the longer term. In fact, a [national study](#) that tracked children from states' early intervention programs as they entered elementary school found that only 58 percent were receiving special education services when they entered school. Thirty-two percent of children were considered to not only have a disability or developmental delay, while ten percent had a disability or delay but did not receive special education services. During the COVID-19 pandemic, ECI successfully pivoted to providing effective telehealth services, extending a lifeline to Texas' most vulnerable, isolated young children but since 2021, state investment has not kept pace with rising enrollment rates.

ECI Programs Have Been Chronically Underfunded – Leading To Program Closures and Under Enrollment

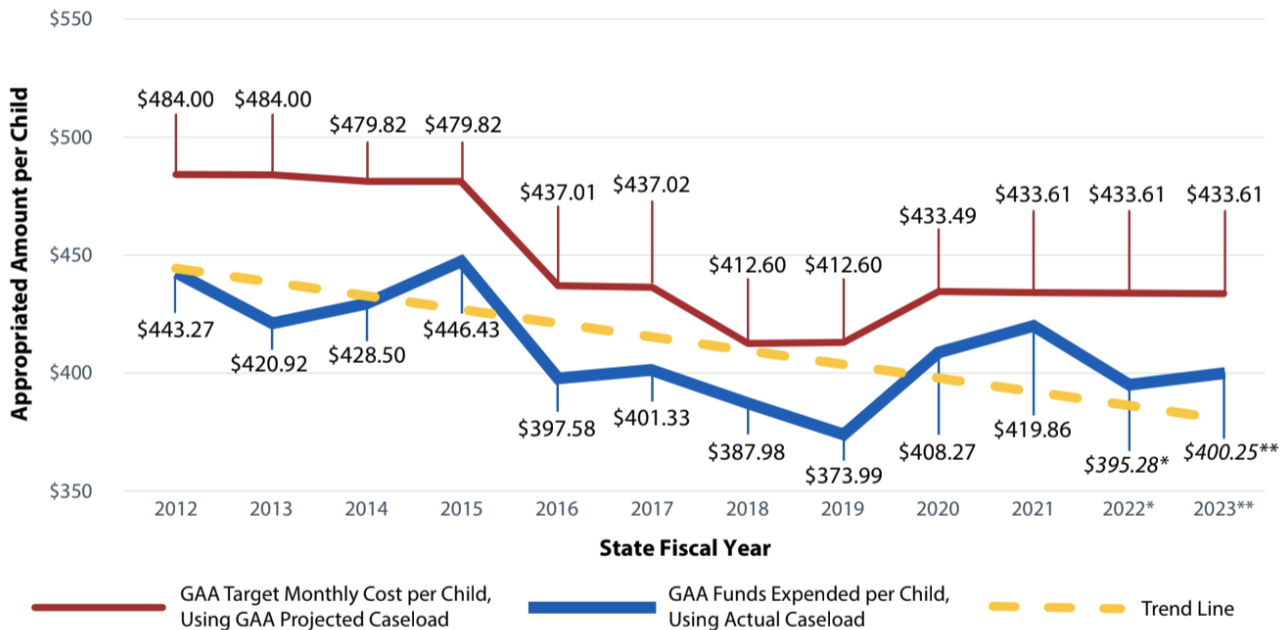
Over the last decade, state leaders cut ECI funding and Medicaid reimbursement rates for therapy providers. Programs were shuttered. Eligible babies and toddlers went without intervention. In response to public outcry, the 2019 Texas Legislature restored some ECI funding, but per child funding levels are still below previous levels. Eligible babies and toddlers continue to go without.



ECI Providers Across Texas Are Being Asked To Serve More Kids With Less Funding

Funding per child continues to drop. While the Legislature funded the ECI program at \$433.61 per child during the 87th Legislative Session, the amount allocated per child is actually lower given current enrollment numbers. The **actual** funding per child as of April 2022 was only \$410.¹ This continues a trend where the actual funding per child is lower than the target funding allocated by the state and lower than per-child funding ten years ago. Like many programs and industries across Texas, ECI programs have been hit with rising costs to provide services due to inflation, including transportation costs. Inadequate per-child funding has exacerbated staff shortages, and reduced outreach efforts, resulting in kids in ECI getting fewer services. In order to get per-child funding to an adequate level for ECI programs to provide services, it is critical that we take into account cost growth. Legislative action to strengthen ECI is imperative – and starts with more funding.

Appropriated Amount per Child — GAA Target vs. Actual



The graph, provided by HHSC, shows that the target for per-child funding allocated by the state is consistently lower than the actual funding per child that ECI providers receive to serve kids.²

The 2010 GAA Target Monthly Cost per Child was \$504, which was removed to allow a decade comparison.³

¹ <https://www.hhs.texas.gov/sites/default/files/documents/aug-2022-eci-agenda-item-3.pdf>

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

Steps Lawmakers Should Take To Strengthen ECI and Support Texas Infants and Toddlers with Disabilities

1. **To account for growing demand for ECI services among infants and toddlers, as well as rising costs of services, Texas should fully fund HHSC's Exceptional Item # 11 and raise the Per Child Funding to \$504.** In order to ensure sustainability and continued participation of ECI programs, per-child investments need to increase and keep up pace with increasing costs. This investment is only \$100 more per child at the current funding level of \$410 and around \$70 more per child compared to the funding per child allocated by the legislature in the 87th session. Programs need this additional funding to serve all eligible children in their communities.
2. **Ensure state-regulated private health insurance plans cover and reimburse ECI therapies and services, including Specialized Skills Training and Targeted Case Management.** When insurers do not cover these common effective services, the costs fall directly on state taxpayers as ECI providers must cover those costs through their state contract. This creates a potential financial barrier to accessing services for many families, which results in more costs to the state later on in special education programs.
3. **Expand the number of services within the current ECI service list that are eligible for Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) funding, such as counseling.** The state auditor's office TANF efficiency audit for FY 2018-2021 recommended adding additional services to the ECI service list that are eligible for TANF funding, such as counseling. By adding additional services, Texas will be able to draw down more federal funding through TANF to support ECI programs.

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