
Early Childhood Intervention Advocacy Coalition

2025 Legislative Agenda

The Texas Legislature Should Provide Funding to the ECI Program to Help Toddlers with Disabilities Reach Developmental Goals

January 2025

ECI Programs Provide Life-Changing Therapies To Infants And Toddlers With Disabilities – When They Have Access To It

Early Childhood Intervention contracts with community organizations – such as Easter Seals, Any Baby Can, and Texana Center – to provide life-changing therapies and services to babies and toddlers with autism, Down syndrome, and other disabilities and developmental delays. By serving children during the critical first three years of life, a time of rapid brain development, **ECI is highly effective in helping children learn to walk, communicate with their families, get ready to start school, and meet other developmental goals.**

The Legislature Made Progress in 2023, But Failed to Significantly Increase Per-Child Funding

Last session, the Legislature funded HHSC's \$56.6 million request in 2023. That funding only addressed the projected rise in enrollment. Additionally, the Legislature invested another \$6 million to start raising per-child funding. However, current state per-child funding of \$452 is far below the \$504 target set by the Legislature in 2010. Adjusting for inflation, per-child state funding for ECI has fallen from \$727 (in 2024 dollars) to \$452 – meaning funding dropped by 38 percent in real dollars since 2010.¹

ECI Providers Across Texas are Being Asked to Serve More Kids With Less Funding

In its 2025 Legislative Appropriation Request, HHSC was not able to propose increased General Revenue funding for ECI, which undermines the progress made last session to address caseload growth and incrementally increase per-child funding. The base budget request will reduce per-child funding from \$452 in 2025 to \$424 for 2026-2027, due to caseload growth and rising costs. At this depressed funding level, ECI's already lean programs will continue to struggle financially, further reducing critical service hours for enrolled children and potentially forcing more program shutdowns.

Inadequate ECI Funding Undermines Infants' and Toddlers' Development

Inadequate funding significantly hinders the effectiveness of Child Find outreach, leading to many children starting ECI services late or missing them altogether, which results in slower developmental progress. Furthermore, many children enrolled in ECI do not receive the recommended number of service hours because providers are unable to offer competitive salaries to hire and retain enough qualified therapists. As a result, therapists are often overloaded with larger caseloads, which negatively impacts their ability to deliver quality services to each child.

¹ Calculated using the Bureau of Labor Statistics CPI Inflation Calculator, comparing August 2010 to August 2024: <https://data.bls.gov/cgi-bin/cpicalc.pl?cost1=504&year1=201008&year2=202408>

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

1. Fully fund HHSC’s Exceptional Item #5 to account for the 3.5% anticipated caseload growth in ECI. If this Exceptional Item is **not** adopted, the state will decrease per-child funding from \$452 in 2025 to \$424 for 2026-2027, undermining the progress made last session.
2. Provide a 6 percent Medicaid reimbursement increase for Specialized Skill Training (SST) and Targeted Case Management (TCM), which have not been updated since 2011. Both of these are essential ECI services provided.

SST is an ECI service where staff work closely with families to strengthen parents’ ability to help their toddlers develop problem-solving, behavior, and social skills during everyday family activities.

TCM is an ECI service where ECI specialists work one-on-one with families to help them find and access community resources, such as coordinating medical and specialist appointments, monitoring the effectiveness of services, and facilitating the transition to preschool so families reach goals for themselves and their children.

3. Increase General Revenue funding for the ECI program to begin restoring per-child funding after years of decline. In order to ensure sustainability and continued participation of ECI programs, per-child investments need to increase and keep pace with increasing costs. Programs need additional funding to serve all eligible children in their communities.

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