

Early Childhood Intervention

October 14, 2024

KEY TAKEAWAYS

1. Statewide Early Childhood Intervention (ECI) services support children aged 0 to 3 with developmental delays or other disabilities by intervening early to reduce or eliminate the need for costly services later.
2. Timely recognition, screening, and access to ECI services are critical for children with developmental delays and disabilities.

Background

Early Childhood Intervention (ECI) is a statewide program for families with children under the age of 3 who are experiencing developmental delays and disabilities, or certain medical diagnoses that impact development.¹

- Eligibility for ECI:¹
 - Developmental delay
 - Deaf/hard of hearing or blind/visually impaired
 - Medically diagnosed condition that is likely to cause a developmental delay and necessitates services
- Why intervene early?²
 - Interventions are likely to be more effective when provided **earlier**, rather than later, in childhood.
 - Early intervention can change a child's developmental path and improve their outcomes.
 - Families and communities benefit in the long term.
 - The need for and intensity of school-based services is reduced.

For kids who are diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), early intervention:^{3, 4}



improves social and communication outcomes



promotes greatest gains in IQ and reduction in ASD severity



improves behavior and reduces parent stress



promotes independent functioning via improved cognitive skills and adaptive behaviors

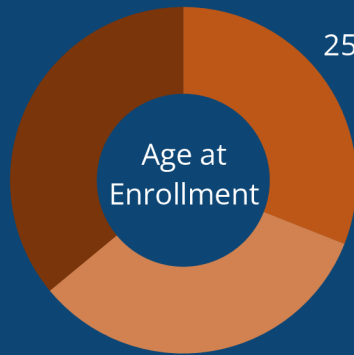
Early Childhood Intervention in Texas

Texas has more than 1.55 million children between 0-3 years old. It is estimated that 6% of the 0-3 population has a disability.⁵

- In 2022, 94,178 Texas children were referred to ECI services, with 65,584 children (**70% of referrals**) receiving comprehensive ECI services.⁶
 - Texas ECI served 3.7% of the 0-3 population.

Texas Children Receiving ECI Services by Socio-Demographics (2022)⁶

13-24 Mo: 36%



Age at Enrollment

0-12 Mo: 33%

25-36 Mo: 31%



64%



36%

Hispanic/Latino, 53%

White, 34%

Black/African American, 9%

Other Races/Two or More Races, 4%

Because ECI treats rather than identifies developmental delays and disabilities, their services are dependent on the quality of referrals they receive.

- Identification of developmental delays and disabilities may be made by:
 - Medical providers during well-child visits
 - Medical providers have high rates of conducting screening practices and utilizing validated and standardized tools.
 - Parents or guardians
 - Childcare providers (preschool teachers and childcare staff)
- Childcare providers may face unique challenges in screening and referral practices due to:⁷
 - Lack of experience or low level of comfort with discussing children's challenging behaviors and developmental delays with parents.
 - Some childcare centers utilize validated screening tools while others utilize online resources or create their own tools.
 - Confusion about the screening process and how it differs from tracking developmental milestones.
 - Lack of recognition of the importance of developmental screening.

Referral Sources for All Referrals (2022)⁶

Medical/Health Services, 64%

Parent/Family/Friends, 21%

Social Services, 10%

ECI Programs, 4%

Educational, 2%

Reasons for ECI Eligibility (2022)⁶

Medical Diagnosis
13%

Hearing/Vision
1%

Developmental Delay
86%

Next Steps

ECI is critical to helping children with developmental delays improve their abilities and learn new skills. Additional actions and efforts are needed to increase the timely recognition of children with possible developmental delays and access to ECI services.

- Implement training to improve childcare providers' efficacy and capacity to have difficult conversations about children's developmental delays with parents, especially in early learning (e.g., public pre-K, childcare centers, home-based childcare) and family support (e.g., Home Visiting Programs, Family Resources Centers) sectors.⁷
- Implement training to help providers in early learning sectors better recognize & screen for developmental delays and improve their ability to help parents access early intervention services when needed.⁷
- Increase state-level funding for ECI services to account for the growing need for early intervention and developmental monitoring.

Experts

Dorothy Mandell, PhD

UTHealth Houston School of Public Health in Austin

Alexandra van den Berg, PhD, MPH

UTHealth Houston School of Public Health in Austin

Deanna M. Hoelscher, PhD, RDN, LD, CNS, FISBNPA

UTHealth Houston School of Public Health in Austin

Content development and research for this report were led by Yuzi Zhang and Kaitlin Berns. For further information, please contact TXRPCNetwork@uth.tmc.edu.

Reference

1. Early Childhood Intervention Services (ECI) | Texas Health and Human Services. Retrieved May 31, 2024, from Early Childhood Intervention Services (ECI) | Texas Health and Human Services. Accessed May 31, 2024. <https://www.hhs.texas.gov/services/disability/early-childhood-intervention-services-eci>
2. CDC. (2024, April 3). Learn the Signs. Act Early. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. CDC. Learn the Signs. Act Early. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Published April 3, 2024. Accessed May 31, 2024. <https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/actearly/whyActEarly.html>
3. Bradshaw, J., Steiner, A. M., Gengoux, G., & Koegel, L. K. (2015). Feasibility and effectiveness of very early intervention for infants at-risk for autism spectrum disorder: A systematic review. *Journal of autism and developmental disorders*, 45, 778-794. <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10803-014-2235-2>
4. Landa, R. J. (2018). Efficacy of early interventions for infants and young children with, and at risk for, autism spectrum disorders. *International Review of Psychiatry*, 30(1), 25-39. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6034700/>
5. Texas Demographic Center (2024, July 5). <https://demographics.texas.gov/Estimates/2022/>
6. ECI Consumer Profile Fiscal Year 2022 | Texas Health and Human Services. Retrieved May 31, 2024, from <https://www.hhs.texas.gov/providers/assistive-services-providers/early-childhood-intervention-programs/eci-data-reports>
7. Mandell, D. J., & Poulos, N. (2023). Early Childhood System Needs Assessment in Texas. [Mandell, D. J., & Poulos, N. \(n.d.\). Early Childhood System Needs Assessment in Texas.](#)

Suggested Citation

Zhang Y, Berns K, Handler K, Linton R, Menendez T, Mandell D, van den Berg AE, Hoelscher DM. UTHealth Houston School of Public Health, Michael & Susan Dell Center for Healthy Living. October 14, 2024. Early Childhood Intervention. A report of the Texas Research-to-Policy Collaboration Project.