

SUMMARY OF JULY 2011 CHANGES TO CALIFORNIA EARLY START AND THE NEW PREVENTION RESOURCE AND REFERRAL SERVICES (PRRS)

BACKGROUND

All states have early intervention services for infants and toddlers from birth to 36 months who have developmental delays. California Early Start is the name of the early intervention program in California.

As a result of California State budget reductions, significant changes to law regarding California Early Start were implemented in 2009. The definition of developmental delay became more restrictive. Other eligibility criteria for Early Start reverted back to the more restrictive Federal requirements. As of October 2009 infants that fell into the "at risk" category were no longer eligible for Early Start. Instead, the Department of Developmental Services implemented a new "Prevention Program." Under the management of the Regional Centers, the Prevention Program provided evaluation, case management, monitoring of developmental progress and referral to community services for "at risk" infants not eligible for Early Start

RECENT CHANGES

As of July 2011 deeper budget cuts caused the elimination of the "Prevention Program." The scope of services was reduced and information and referral services for "at risk" infants were shifted to local Early Start family resource centers and are called Prevention Resource and Referral Services (PRRS). Under Prevention Resource and Referral Services, (administered by the Family Resource Center Network of California) family resource centers ensure the timely delivery of outreach, information regarding child development, and referral to community services to "at-risk" babies in all 21 regional catchment areas throughout the state. Community services are defined as age appropriate publicly or privately funded services, such as Healthy Families, Mommy and Me programs, local library,



support groups, Early Head Start and Parks and Recreation Programs. While PRRS does not provide "case management", they do stay in regular contact with the parents and families until the child turns three and then they support the child and family with transition to other services. If concerns about development arise, the child may be re-referred to the Regional Center for assessment and evaluation to determine eligibility for Early Start.

For more information about the PRRS visit the DDS Birth to 36 Months Home Page, <http://www.dds.ca.gov/Birth36Months/Index.cfm> the FRCNCA website <http://www.frcnca.org/> or see the related document, "Introducing PRRS Services."

For contact information about your local Early Start Family Resource Center and Regional Center visit the County Activities <http://www.cainclusion.org/camap/counties.html> area of the MAP to Inclusion and Belonging website.



HOW DO THESE CHANGES AFFECT REFERRALS?

Despite changes in eligibility and service delivery some things have not changed. When a parent, family member, care provider, medical provider or other professional has a concern about an infant or toddler's development, early identification is critical. Intervention is most effective in the first three years of life. It's important that infants and toddlers with developmental concerns or at risk for developmental delays are referred or re-referred* to the Regional Centers for assessment and evaluation. Only Regional Centers can determine eligibility for Early Start. If the child is not eligible for Early Start Regional Centers refer to local Early Start family resource centers for PRRS based on specific risk factors. To further clarify the need for continued referrals of children who may fall into the "at risk" category, here's an example from a hospital:

A nurse practitioner from a local hospital reported back about a significant change regarding referrals that was implemented after the River Valley information session on PRRS. Since the changes in law as of October 2009, the medical providers at this hospital understood that infants "at risk" for developmental delays were no longer eligible for Early Start. Although in general this is correct, the hospital assumed that meant that they should no longer provide referrals of infants in the "at risk" category to the Regional Center. After the information session, the representative from the hospital realized that all infants with developmental delays as well as those "at risk" for developmental delays should be referred to the Regional Center for evaluation and assessment to determine eligibility for Early Start or for referral to PRRS. She explained this at grand rounds and the hospital has expanded their referrals to Regional Center to include infants "at risk."

WHY ARE THESE CHANGES SIGNIFICANT FOR CHILD CARE PROVIDERS?

Child care providers are often the first to notice developmental concerns. With years of experience combined with knowledge of child development and a trusting relationship with the family, child care providers may serve an important role in supporting a family in initial identification of a developmental or behavioral concern.. Also, if the infant was initially found ineligible for Early Start services, the child care provider may be in a position to assist in monitoring developmental progress and if needed support the family in re-referral to the Regional Center for re-evaluation.*

HOW DO WE ENSURE THAT ALL FAMILIES GET THE SERVICES THEY NEED?

Early Start Family Resource Centers have been a respected source of information, resources and parent to parent support for families of children with disabilities and special needs for many years. If you provide services to children from birth to age three and you are not familiar with your local Early Start Family Resource Center, now is the time to introduce yourself. All families and service providers are welcome to call and find out about the services of the ESFRC. The ESFRCs have experienced staff who can provide support to a family with concerns about their child's development and help them connect them with the local Regional Center for assessment and evaluation if needed or guide them to other appropriate resources. Families referred to PRRS from Regional Centers are in good hands. The Infant Development Association and the MAP to Inclusion and Belonging Project Team believe that ESFRCs are looking out for the best interests of the children and families.

* Often infants who do not initially qualify for Early Start, develop delays a few months later that would qualify them for Early Start. A developmental baseline is established at the first evaluation and assessment at the Regional Centers. The Regional Centers encourage re-referral if concerns about development resurface.