



first steps

Annual Report 2021

Presented by the **Interagency Coordinating Council
on Infants and Toddlers**

A message from ICC Chair, Barb Blain

Dear Governor Holcomb,

On behalf of the members of the Interagency Coordinating Council (ICC) on Infants and Toddlers, I respectfully submit the annual report of the ICC.

I would like to acknowledge that 2021 has been a year of challenges for all Hoosiers. Throughout the year, the pandemic continued to impact the delivery of First Steps services to infants, toddlers, and their families. In response, personnel continued to adapt and deliver both in-person and virtual services, helping to maintain access while holding close the priority of health and safety of all participating and working in the program.

Though this year has had its challenges, First Steps has also seen a great accomplishment in the roll out of a robust statewide online platform, EIHub. The First Steps program, led by Christina Commons, Director of First Steps, partnered with Public Consulting Group on this ambitious project which consists of provider enrollment, learning management, case management, service documentation, and claims processing. The new system offers real-time statewide data collection. This will support federal and state data reporting and enhance data driven decision making. While this new system has been challenging at times, First Steps stakeholders have a shared commitment for the success and continuous quality improvement of EIHub.

Recently, the ICC took the time to reflect on the last five years and celebrated First Steps' accomplishments. We would like to highlight the following:

- Enhanced professional development offerings including an annual conference
- Improved partnerships among state and local child and family serving agencies
- Expanded efforts in the identification of children who may benefit from early intervention
- Creation of informational materials in a variety of languages
- A social media campaign launch
- Effective virtual service delivery, improving access to early intervention leading to a decrease in missed appointments
- Historic increase in state funding for early intervention leading to a rate increase for personnel
- Increased Medicaid reimbursement for services rendered
- Improved processes and policies
- Adoption of Family Guided Routines Based Intervention (FGRBI) aimed at empowering families through a coaching framework
- Modernized IT system

It has been an honor to collaborate with the members of the ICC this year. I'd like to thank each member for sharing their expertise, dedication, time, and commitment to First Step in 2021. Your contribution continues to result in positive outcomes for our youngest Indiana citizens.



What is the ICC?

Indiana's Interagency Coordinating Council on Infants and Toddlers (ICC) is a Governor appointed body required by Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and established under IC 12-12-7-2. The Division of Disability and Rehabilitative Services (DDRS), a division of the Family and Social Services Administration (FSSA), is designated as the lead agency. The ICC is charged with advising and assisting DDRS in its responsibility to develop an early intervention system of the highest quality, balancing family centered services with fiscal responsibility. Comprised of members representing parents of children with special needs, state agency groups, early intervention service providers, legislators, and others, the ICC is committed to holding the vision of First Steps and to keeping abreast of issues, concerns, and trends which may affect the First Steps System.



What is first steps

Indiana's First Steps System is a family-centered, locally-based, coordinated system that provides early intervention services to infants and toddlers with disabilities or who are developmentally vulnerable. First Steps brings together professionals from education, health, and social service agencies to provide skilled therapeutic interventions that promote age appropriate development of infants and toddlers experiencing developmental delays.



First Steps Services

Assistive Technology
Audiological Services
Developmental Therapy
Nursing Services
Nutrition Services
Occupational Therapy

Physical Therapy
Psychological Services
Service Coordination
Speech Therapy
Social Work Services
Vision Services

A complete list of services provided under Part C can be found at 34 CFR 303.13 (b)

State Fiscal Year Funding Summary

First Steps accesses a variety of funding sources. The ICC helps DDRS identify and coordinate all available resources from federal, state, local, and private sources, and use all applicable resources to the full extent possible.

The total spent on direct services for children with IFSPs in 2021 was \$49,124,374.42. The total spent on SPOE contracts which includes Service Coordination was \$14,025,398.70.

Funding Source SFY21	% of Total Funding
Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)	36%
Medicaid	15%
Federal Part C	27%
State Part C	7%
Private Insurance	6%
Social Services Block Grant (SSBG)	8%
Family Cost Participation	1%

Service Levels

	SFY2017	SFY2018	SFY2019	SFY2020**	SFY2021***
Annual Referral Count	27,971	28,689	30,091	27,198**	21,060***
Annual Count of Children Served (regardless of IFSP*)	24,838	26,363	26,527	28,894**	23,574***
Annual Count of Children with an IFSP	20,775	22,074	22,964	23,347**	21,811***

*Annual, unduplicated count of children served regardless of IFSP. This includes eligible children who received an IFSP and early intervention services as well as children who were referred to First Steps and received evaluation and assessment services, but were not eligible for early intervention services. **Query mechanism for this data was changed, and there was a decrease related to the global pandemic. ***Data for 2021 was impacted by the launch of a new data collection system and consequently does not represent a full year.

Legislative Summary

Representative Ed Clere, Indiana House District 72, ICC Member

The pandemic influenced every aspect of the 2021 legislative session – from the physical location and conduct of committee meetings and floor sessions to the content of bills and the tenor of debate. Although there was no legislation specific to First Steps, Senate Enrolled Act (SEA) 3 made permanent certain telehealth provisions that were initiated by executive order. The executive orders covered a wide array of providers, including most First Steps providers. SEA 3 included a narrower list of licensed professionals, leaving out many First Steps providers. Recognizing that telehealth has the potential to play an important role in First Steps beyond the pandemic, there will be a need for additional legislation in the 2022 session.

In addition to highlighting opportunities such as telehealth, the pandemic has further underscored the vital importance of First Steps and its incalculable value as an investment in our state's future. As schools throughout Indiana work to address learning loss resulting from the pandemic, the students who have been most heavily impacted are children who receive special education services. As Indiana gets back on track, the imperative nature of First Steps is more evident than ever. When infants and toddlers receive First Steps services, they are less likely to require special education services, or if they do need services, they are likely to require fewer services for less duration. The investment continues to pay off – for both the individual and the state – for the rest of the person's life, resulting in greater independence, more workforce options and participation and overall better quality of life.

With the 2021 budget session in the rearview mirror, the 2023 budget session is growing larger in the windshield, and strong advocacy for First Steps will be critical as budget priorities begin to be developed – a process that is already under way. Thanks to sustained and tireless advocacy by stakeholders, the 2019 state budget included a significant funding increase for First Steps, and the 2021 budget maintained the new level of support. Of course, the world has changed since the 2019 budget was passed. At the time, the long-overdue increase was intended to allow First Steps to catch up in the competition for employees. Now, First Steps is at growing risk of falling behind again as a result of workforce shortages and rising labor costs, and additional funding will be necessary to keep pace. Building on the tremendous advocacy efforts from 2018 and 2019, we must continue to stress the importance of early intervention services and start making the case now for addressing the needs we will be bringing forth during the 2023 legislative session.



First Steps Funding Increase Needed



- In 2018, a provider reimbursement rate study, as required by HEA 1317, determined reimbursement rates for Indiana's First Steps providers to be **significantly (roughly 60%) lower than regional market rates**.
- The provider reimbursement rate study recommended increasing rates in order to recruit and retain the talent necessary to serve the children covered by First Steps.
- In 2019, First Steps was able to modestly increase provider reimbursement rates thanks to a budget increase supported by the legislature and the Governor's office, the first in 20 years.
- Despite the increase in 2019, which was roughly 25-30% of the recommended rate, providers are still well below the regional market rate in 2018.
- With added wage pressures over the last 18 months, it will become increasingly more difficult to recruit and retain the necessary talent to fulfill the growing needs of the community served by First Steps.



First Steps: Positively Influencing Lives for More Than 30 Years

Hi, my name is Anna.

When I was a baby, I was delayed reaching my gross motor milestones. My pediatrician diagnosed me with hypotonia and referred me to First Steps. I received physical therapy for 2 years. My First Steps physical therapist worked with me and gave my parents exercises to do at home. My physical therapist helped me grow stronger to sit up, crawl, and eventually walk. When I was dismissed from First Steps, my physical therapist told my parents that I should participate in a fun, physical activity. She suggested my parents enroll me in a dance class. I am so glad they took her advice! I have been taking dance lessons for 13 years now. I have studied ballet, tap, jazz, and contemporary. I even had the opportunity to dance with the Moscow Ballet in the Great Russian Nutcracker at the Murat one Christmas. In middle school, I was on the dance team. Now I am 16 years old and sing and dance in my high school's varsity show choir. I can't imagine my life without dance. It brings me so much joy and has given me so many amazing opportunities. I am so thankful that I had physical therapy when I was little to help me grow stronger and become a dancer.