



2023 Annual Report

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

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.

Over the last three years, I have been a part of a dedicated team of parents, providers, service coordinators and system partners who represent our early intervention community and serve some of the most vulnerable members of our state.

The First Steps early intervention program provides an amazing service for Indiana families where the treatment services come to the families. These skilled therapists travel to homes and child care facilities for infants and toddlers who have developmental delays, supporting families in need while working with these children to help them reach key development milestones prior to school enrollment.

The ICC would like to thank the Governor and the General Assembly for advocating for First Steps receipt of Hoosier Family First Funds and sustaining that investment by supporting an increase in First Steps appropriation. With this support, this past year was one marked by the successful implementation of First Steps provider rate increases, as well as the SPOE contract allocations, to support increased retention and recruitment for these skilled positions.

At the same time, early intervention referrals continue to grow here in Indiana and there is a continued need to invest in teams to provide timely services. With the changes to Indiana's legislation this year regarding abortions, we are anticipating continued growth in First Steps referrals while simultaneously experiencing more competition for staffing a skilled workforce.

Our First Steps state team, led by Director Christina Commons, continues to use data to work on improving services in key service clusters around the state and more effectively deploy the resources available but this is still not enough. In addition to the investments in the data and analytics resources, updates to the EI Hub software continue to modernize the agency and create efficiency in daily operations, better alignment with federal reporting requirements, and additional data to support First Steps recruitment efforts.

In order to meet the growing demand for services, First Steps needs a competitive compensation package to attract, hire and retain professionals. The 2023 rate change was approved from 2018 wage data that is already out of date even before the current period of inflation. Investing in early intervention services reaps a return of 13% ROI by reducing the need for additional school support and ongoing medical services for these individuals. Long term it can help these children find a path to being a tax paying member of our community instead of an adult fully dependent on SSI care.

I ask you to continue to invest state time and resources in such a critical program for the long-term wellbeing of our state. My 7-year-old son has Cerebral Palsy and has been on his own growth curve his entire life, but thanks to First Steps he continues to steadily make up ground after starting slowly. All Indiana families deserve to have a strong foundation to raise their children and allow for their infants and toddlers to grow and flourish to their highest potential.

Thank you,
Mark Guyer
ICC Chair

*A message
from the ICC Chair
Mark Guyer*

What is First Steps?

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



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 First Steps.



State Fiscal Year Funding Summary

First Steps accesses a variety of funding sources. The ICC works to help 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 amount spent on eligibility determination and direct services for children in SFY 2023 was \$64,344,324.56, excluding System Point of Entries (SPOEs). The total cost of SPOE contracts which deliver Service Coordination was \$12,862,271.91.

Funding Source	Percent of Total
TANF	11.82%
Medicaid	34.18%
Federal Part C	4.40%
State Part C	26.70%
Private Insurance	21.12%
Social Services Block Grant	0.38%
Family Cost Participation	1.40%

The Franklin Family's Story

We are the Franklin family. We used First Steps, and we loved them. Zoey and Alexander (Xander) were born at 34 weeks, and they spent about 29 days in the NICU. Once they were released from the NICU, the nurses didn't see any problems initially, it wasn't until they were in daycare at the Edna Martin Christian Center. The teachers noticed that Xander was walking a little funny. His feet were doing something different. Zoey just didn't have the balance and she really wasn't walking well. They were a little bit under a year old. We also noticed that Xander wasn't really saying anything. They weren't developing just right. We were referred to First Steps and they were evaluated. The process was simple. The coordinator came out and met me at the daycare, and then they did the evaluation.

They started with physical therapy. The neat thing about that was that the therapist came to our house and provided services at our home with the twins. She was very accommodating and conducted back-to-back sessions. We really enjoyed that and liked that for them because sometimes one doesn't want to do anything unless the other one is participating. Eventually they started walking and were really progressing. Then COVID-19 hit. We started doing virtual therapy. It was a little bit challenging keeping their attention. Eventually the therapist was able to start seeing them at their new daycare.

During our two years with First Steps, the kids did physical therapy, then they did speech therapy. Xander continued with developmental therapy for speech. They progressed nicely once they turned three and didn't require additional services. The kids can really do a lot of movement and they're now in gymnastics. The things that we really liked were our therapists, they were awesome. They included me and my husband. Our therapist also gave us good strategies to continue at home. The reports were very helpful even when we couldn't be there at the sessions at the daycare, we knew what was going on and what to work on from the reports. The therapists were good about taking video footage of the progression to keep us in the loop.

One of the dislikes with First Steps was the virtual sessions. It was really challenging. We would do it for 2 hours; it was just a long time because we did one child and then the other. Trying to keep their attention over Zoom was difficult. Overall, we are very grateful for the opportunity to participate in the First Steps program. I think it worked wonders for them and got them on track, and now they're doing fantastic. They are at a Spanish immersion preschool, and they're moving along well. And they are speaking Spanish as well as English. They now enjoy going for ice cream, swimming, gymnastics and are playing T-ball for the first time.



30,100

**Indiana children
were served by
First Steps in 2023**



Planning for the Future

2023 Indiana Early Intervention Conference

We were thrilled and grateful more than 760 early intervention personnel, infant and early childhood mental health professionals and families were able to join us either in-person or via the live stream option for the 2023 Indiana Early Intervention Conference in June. First Steps would like to thank our conference partners, Infancy Onward, the team at the Indiana Institute on Disability and the Community at Indiana University and our conference planning committee for working so hard to put on such an amazing event. We truly appreciate all our conference sponsors and exhibitors. They were vital to the success of this event. Our keynote speakers, Adar Cohen, PhD offered ideas and strategies around having difficult conversations, Sonia Manzano, Maria from Sesame Street, offered her perspective on growing up in the Bronx and how she felt included and a sense of belonging in her neighborhood that she was able to bring to Sesame Street and Gina Forrest, PhD shared her ideas around promoting equity and diversity with families.

The conference was an important experience where professionals and family members came together, learned from one another, shared ideas and best practices, networked and enhanced their early intervention knowledge and skills. All who attended enjoyed high-quality breakout sessions, enriching their practice. We look forward to the 2024 Indiana Early Intervention Conference June 13-14 in Bloomington.

Looking Toward 2024

The ICC members will meet with Emerald Consulting in January 2024 to develop a strategic plan for 2024 and beyond. The council looks forward to the conversation with Maureen Greer as she leads the council through conversations to develop a strategic plan for the future of the ICC that supports First Steps priorities.

The council is also moving forward with a new child assessment tool to help determine eligibility for our First Steps infants and toddlers. The state has been using the Assessment Evaluation Programming System for Infants and Toddlers Second Edition (AEPS) since 2006. A sub-committee of the ICC has spent much of 2023 researching assessment tools being used around the country in search of an updated instrument that complies with existing Indiana law and promotes our systems values of being family centered, strengths-based, relationship-based, holistic, culturally competent, routines-based, and individualized.

With the continued support of the Indiana Statehouse and the dedication of our statewide network of early intervention providers, we feel confident tackling the challenges that lie ahead in 2024 and beyond. The council is honored to represent a dedicated team of parents, health care professionals, service coordinators, and stakeholders from across Indiana who represent our early intervention community and we look forward to the future of the First Steps program.