

# Annual Report 2022

Presented by the Interagency Coordinating Council on Infants and Toddlers

## A message from ICC Chair, Mariann Frigo

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.

The First Steps early intervention program provides crucial skilled therapies to at risk infants and toddlers allowing them to reach milestones prior to school enrollment.

Adapting to the post pandemic era, early intervention referrals continue to grow here in Indiana and nationwide due to limited interactions during quarantine, restricted peer to peer play and masked reciprocal play. Additionally, with the abortion law changes, we expect continued growth in First Steps referrals.

Indiana currently has over 1,500 delayed infants and toddlers unable to get the crucial skilled therapies needed. First Steps continues to experience a perpetual shrinking workforce as therapists and service coordinators are paid 35-60% less than colleagues (Bureau of Labor statistics 2021, Glassdoor 2022, First Steps salary survey 2022).

Our First Steps state team, led by Director Christina Commons, has worked diligently to improve services. To slow the flight out of First Steps, a one-time recruitment and retention bonus was granted to service coordinators and therapists.

To meet the growing demand for services, First Steps will need a competitive compensation package to attract and hire professionals. The ICC committee is seeking to increase the current 18 million dollar budget by an additional 26 million to adequately staff the First Steps program in order to provide crucial services to our 0-3 population currently waiting.

While we all agree funding preschool is an important part of state resources with an ROI of 7-10%, investing in early intervention services reaps a 13% ROI (Heckman 2012). Furthermore, changing a toddler's trajectory reduces the need for additional school supports, ongoing medical services and shifts their target from being an adult dependent on our SSI system to becoming an employable taxpaying member of our community.

I am honored to be a part of this dedicated team of parents, providers, services coordinators, and stakeholders who represent our early intervention community. I would like you to join us in insuring our youngest at-risk Hoosiers and their families receive these critical services by increasing the First Steps budget to 44 million in the coming year.

## 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
- Physical Therapy
- Audiological Services
- Psychological Services
- Developmental Therapy
- Service Coordination
- Nursing Services
- Speech Therapy
- Nutrition Services
- Social Work Services
- Occupational Therapy
- Vision Services.

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

## Service Levels

### *Number of Children Served Regardless of IFSP*

Year	Number of Children
2017	24838
2018	26363
2019	26527
2020	26031
2021	26627
2022	27712

## 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 eligibility determination and direct services for children in SFY 2022 was \$50,732,715.07. The total cost of SPOE contracts which deliver Service Coordination was \$14,025,398.70

Funding Sources FY22	% of Total Funding
Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)	18%
Medicaid	33%
Federal Part C	3%
State Part C	25%
Private Insurance	12%
Social Services Block Grant (SSBG)	8%
Family Cost Participation	1%

## Investing in Our State's Future Representative Ed Clere, Indiana House District 72, ICC Member

Imagine a profession that allows you to work in a safe, comfortable, predictable environment with support and resources close at hand – a setting with a coffee pot and a place to store and eat your lunch, or even the opportunity to enjoy a hot lunch prepared by someone else. Now imagine working out of your car as you drive from appointment to appointment in all kinds of weather, never knowing what you may encounter. Some people won't be home. Some places may be a little scary. Lunch – if you have time to stop – will be from a drive-through window. Given the choice, most people would probably pick the former, but some very special people

choose the latter. They are the therapists and staff who are the backbone of Indiana's First Steps program. They are the individuals – physical therapists, occupational therapists, speech therapists, developmental therapists, service coordinators, dietitians, psychologists, and social workers – who are making it possible for tens of thousands of Hoosier children with developmental delays to have a better life.

First Steps is an investment in our state's future. On an individual level, it can make a profound difference in the life of an infant or toddler who receives services – completely changing the trajectory of a person's life by making possible education and career opportunities and success that otherwise would not have been attainable because of the consequences of developmental delays. Instead, those therapists rewire the child's brain during the fleeting, early years of brain development, while it is still possible to mitigate or even reverse developmental delays. In addition to the life-changing impact on the individual, First Steps is one of the best fiscal investments our state can make – reducing the person's need for costly services in school and in adulthood and increasing the person's ability to participate in society.

Of course, the benefits of First Steps are out of reach if therapists are not available to provide services to infants and toddlers during that critical window of early brain development. First Steps has been struggling to attract and retain therapists. Through-out 2021, there were hundreds of unfilled therapist positions statewide, leaving children waiting for services as their window of opportunity for better developmental and life outcomes started to close. Therapists don't choose to work in First Steps because of the cushy work environment (see above!) or for the money. In fact, in many cases, when a First Steps therapist arrives at a family's home for an appointment and no one is home, the therapist doesn't get paid – for the therapist's time or even for gas. In response to high inflation and ongoing workforce shortages, funding health and human services at sustainable levels will be one of the legislature's most important challenges, and among many competing priorities, there is no better investment than First Steps. The future of thousands of tiny Hoosiers depends on it, and neither they nor our state will get a do-over.

## **Recognize the Signs; Acting Early Makes a World of Difference**

*Alexandra Hall, Parent*

When my son was about 6 months old, I noticed that he was no longer meeting his developmental milestones. He was certainly a happy baby, but he wasn't doing the things a "typically" developing infant should have been doing. Without hesitation, I completed the First Steps referral form and scheduled his assessment. The rest, as they say, is history.

I was so sad as his 3rd birthday approached. First Steps was like family to us, and I couldn't fathom leaving. Fortunately, our amazing Service Coordinator, Mrs. Annie Murphy, submitted my name for consideration in a focus group and First Steps research study. She even kept in touch with us and supported my son through his transition out the program and beyond.

We left First Steps well equipped for the next steps. God must have known we weren't ready to say goodbye just yet. After aging out, my son has had the opportunity to continue seeing his occupational therapists through the outpatient clinic at Riley Hospital and his preschool, respectively. His Service Coordinator continues to check in on him and stay abreast of his progress. I have been blessed with the opportunity to serve on the LPCC. It is my hope that every in child need of services has the phenomenal experience that my child had. I continue to advocate for First Steps and regularly meet with legislators to share the program's impact on my family.

First Steps has been life changing, and to think our amazing journey began with a visit to the CI Baby site. It is my prayer that other parents will not hesitate to act. Early Intervention makes a world of difference.

## Perfect Storm: Crisis Facing Infants and Toddlers

### *Difficulty Recruiting and Retaining Staff Put Indiana's Infants and Toddlers at Risk*

A provider rate study completed in 2018 highlighted that Indiana's First Steps providers were reimbursed significantly lower (roughly 35-60%) than regional market rates.

- In Chesterton a First Steps SLP makes \$58,900 per year. At Creative Health Solutions the same position makes \$93,000 a year.
- In Evansville a First Steps OT makes \$64,800 a year. An OT at Deaconess Health makes \$102,000 a year.
- In Indiana a service coordinator at first steps makes \$34,000 a year while the same position at Villages Adoption makes \$43,000 a year.
- A developmental therapist in Fort Wayne can make \$42,500 a year at First Steps or \$52,000 a year at Brightpoint.
- A physical therapist in Jeffersonville can make \$65,100 a year at First Steps or \$116,000 a year at Vertis.
- Jobs in Indiana that pay more than First Steps pays include a pool supervisor, a hotline worker, a warehouse associate, a team leader at Walmart.

This salary information is taken from a 2021 First Steps Salary Survey and Actual Indeed listings from July 2022 – October 2022.

### *Glaring Disproportionality in Compensation for Therapists*

- Occupational Therapists working in First Steps make \$26,545 less than the Bureau of Labor Statistics say is the average for their job.
- Physical Therapists in First Steps make \$29,894 less than average.
- Speech Language Pathologists in First Steps make \$35,174 less than average.

*Service Coordinator Caseloads Rise at an Alarming Rate*

In 2018 the rate/time study recommended a caseload size of 60 cases for each service coordinator. The current average caseload size for a service coordinator in First Steps is 103.

*An estimated 1500 children are waiting to receive therapy services.*

*Exodus of Therapists Give Rise to Uncertain Future for Indiana's Youngest Residents.*

462 personnel left First Steps since April 2021, making it difficult for children with special needs to get needed help.

Gas prices have increased 49% from January 2022 to June 2022.

Inflation has increased 82% since September of 2021.