



Indiana First Steps 2020 Annual Report

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

A Message from the ICC Chair, Jason Stein

Dear Governor Holcomb,

On behalf of the members of the Interagency Coordinating Council on Infants and Toddlers, I am pleased to submit the annual report of the ICC.

I would like to acknowledge the overwhelming effort and commitment of the parents, service providers, service coordinators and state First Steps staff for ensuring that the children of the great state of Indiana are able to receive the services they need in the midst of a devastating pandemic. All the individuals involved with Indiana's First Steps program have again proven that heart and hard work, for which Hoosiers are known, will not allow even the greatest of challenges from getting done what needs to be done.

As you will read in the following pages, the state First Steps team jumped into action to make the necessary adaptations to keep safe their staff as well as the children being served and evaluated. Those conducting the evaluations and performing therapies were enabled to continue to serve children via tele-health, which was made possible by your Governor's Executive Orders 20-05, 20-12 and 20-13. I am hopeful that what everyone has learned regarding tele-health will allow some form of it to be used for specific circumstances on a permanent basis.

As the pandemic took hold in Indiana earlier this year, referrals to First Steps of children to be evaluated for developmental delays dropped significantly in large part due to fewer visits to primary care physicians and well child check-ups. Physicians are the primary source for First Steps referrals. Those referrals have gradually increased in the past few months and are now closer to what we would expect at this time of year. While the pandemic may have slowed referrals, evaluations and ongoing therapy, it has not reduced the need for these functions. For this reason, those involved in First Steps throughout the state are working diligently to ensure that infants and toddlers continue to be referred and evaluated for delays.

Indiana's First Steps team was recognized by the Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center for its COVID-19 response, including policies, guidance and resources. These served as a model for other IDEA Part C programs across the country. This national recognition is a result of the efforts of Christina Commons, Director of First Steps, Kylee Hope, Director of Disability and Rehabilitative Services, and Dr. Jennifer Sullivan, Secretary of FSSA. I am sure you share my sentiment of how lucky Hoosiers are to have this team in place.

It has been my distinct pleasure and honor to work with the entire membership of the ICC this past year. All ICC's representatives from various state agencies, service providers, service coordinators and parents of children in the First Steps program have demonstrated their commitment to the development of children of Indiana.

What is the ICC?

Indiana's Interagency Coordinating Council on Infants and Toddlers is a Governor appointed body required by Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act and established under IC 12-12-7-2. The Division of Disability and Rehabilitative Services, a division of the Family and Social Services Administration, 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 that can be 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 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 for services in SFY20 was \$47,088,907.32. First Steps continues to explore ways to increase the amount of funding recouped from various sources, especially Medicaid.

Funding Source	Percent of Total Funding
	SFY2020
Temporary Assistance for Needy Families	27%
Medicaid	31%
Federal Part C	6%
State Part C	21%
Private Insurance	7%
Social Services Block Grant	6%
Family Cost Participation	2%

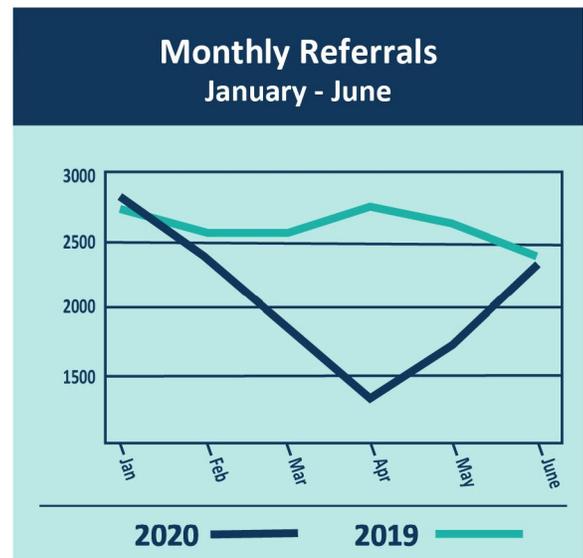
Service Levels

First Steps received 27,198 referrals during state fiscal year 2020. The months prior to the COVID-19 pandemic saw record referrals numbers. The decrease in referrals during SFY 2020 is directly related to the global pandemic. Due to the quick response from state leadership and the effective implementation of virtual therapy practices, referral numbers are on the rise.

	SFY2016	SFY2017	SFY2018	SFY2019	SFY2020**
Annual Referral Count	25,820	27,971	28,689	30,091	27,198
Annual Count of Children Served (regardless of IFSP*)	23,612	24,838	26,363	26,527	28,894
Annual Count of Children with IFSP	19,623	20,775	22,074	22,964	23,347

*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.



First Steps COVID-19 Response: *Christina Commons, First Steps Director*

As a result of the novel coronavirus, COVID-19, First Steps like many other programs needed to react and adjust. To date, First Steps has taken the following steps in order to continue to provide the necessary early intervention services to children and families in Indiana:

- March 16, 2020: First Steps issued new policies, procedures, forms and guidance for the First Steps program, which can be found at www.firststeps.in.gov.
- First Steps implemented tele-health service delivery to ensure continuity of services for children and their families during the public health emergency.
- The Governor's Executive Orders 20-05, 20-12 and 20-13 were critically important, making it possible for licensed First Steps personnel to provide the services written on a child's Individualized Family Service Plan, such as occupational, speech and physical therapies.
- First Steps implemented many professional development opportunities for First Steps personnel to train on delivering tele-health services, as this was a new service delivery method.
- First Steps in collaboration with Indiana Institute on Disability and Community at Indiana University completed a survey of 100 families receiving tele-health services from March through June. This survey indicated that families were grateful their child's early intervention was able to continue during the pandemic.
- First Steps has been nationally recognized by the Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center for its COVID-19 response, including policies, guidance and resources. These served as a model for other IDEA Part C programs across the country.

Due to COVID-19, First Steps saw an expected but notable drop in the number of children referred to the program from March through September. The lowest numbers recorded were in April at more than a 50% decrease from the same time period in State Fiscal Year 2019. Several pandemic-related factors caused the decrease in referrals:

- The largest First Steps referral source is primary care physicians and many primary care offices closed from mid-March through June.
- Many families canceled their child's well child visit with their primary care physicians.
- Childcare saw a significant reduction in the numbers of children served. Many families are referred to First Steps from their childcare providers.

Recognizing the importance of early intervention and child find activities, First Steps partnered and identified ways to start improving appropriate referrals:

- First Steps Local Planning and Coordinating Councils increased their federally required IDEA Part C child find efforts. This included contacting primary care physicians to let them know the program was open and accepting referrals. Services were being provided both in-person and through tele-health.
- The BCDS collaborated with the Office of Early Childhood and Out of School Learning on a text messaging campaign to inform childcare providers and families First Steps was open, receiving referrals and providing services; and to contact the program should they be concerned about their child's development.
- As of October 2020, referrals, although lower than 2019, are rising.

First Steps appreciates all of the therapists, agencies and SPOEs working together to navigate this public health crisis while also delivering the critical early intervention services to infants, toddlers and their families. The ability for families to shift and be coached by our personnel so their children continue to make progress meeting their outcomes has been truly inspiring.





Legislative Summary: Representative Ed Clere, Indiana House District 72, ICC Member

Building on major victories in the 2019 legislative session, including a significant increase in funding, the Interagency Coordinating Council continued to play an active role in legislative advocacy for First Steps in the 2020 session. House Enrolled Act 1176 originated from discussion at an ICC meeting in late 2019. As with the previous year's legislation, HEA 1176 garnered overwhelming bipartisan support, with unanimous passage in the House and near-unanimous passage in the Senate. Among its numerous provisions, HEA 1176:

- Eliminated insurance prior authorization for First Steps services and required parity in insurance coverage of services;
- Provided for time for public input and potential legislative action regarding any proposed changes to the family cost participation schedule; and
- Modernized the ICC statute to help facilitate the council's work.

As the legislature faces unprecedented budget challenges in the upcoming session, it is important to highlight what a difference the 2019 funding increase has already made and continues to make. The ICC and its members have worked closely with The Arc of Indiana, INARF and other stakeholders to educate legislators about First Steps. Thanks to these efforts, legislators are increasingly aware of the life-changing impact of First Steps and many have come to view it as a critical investment in the state's future. In fact, for the tens of thousands of Hoosier infants and toddlers who receive services each year, access to First Steps makes possible later academic, workforce and life success, while also reducing remediation and other costs.

Virtual Therapies are Working for Hoosiers

“ The benefits of offering virtual sessions for my son during this time have been invaluable ... My two-year-old son has a rare genetic condition called hypophosphatasia ... This can have a rickets-like effect on the ribs which, in turn, can also drastically weaken the lungs. My main concern is to keep his risk as low as possible. While in-person sessions have obvious advantages, my son has continued to make extraordinary gains through his online sessions. ... The virtual sessions allow me to practice and incorporate the skills in real time with the guidance of our therapists. He is still gaining so much from these sessions while reducing his risk and staying healthy. ”

Terri L. Sarver, First Steps parent

High quality birth-to-five programs for disadvantaged children can deliver a

13%

Return on Investment

Starting earlier provides greater returns

James Heckman, from Lifecycle Benefits

References

Heckman, J (nd). Research Summary: The Lifecycle Benefits of an Influential Early Childhood Program. Retrieved from <https://heckmanequation.org/resource/research-summary-lifecycle-benefits-influential-early-childhood-program/>