

October 2024

Summary of the Rigorous Research on Early Intervention Services

Early Intervention (EI) services support the healthy development of infants and toddlers who have developmental delays, medical conditions or disabilities, or various environmental or social risk factors for delays. EI programs are implemented at the state level, but they are governed and partially funded by Part C of the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.

EMERGING EVIDENCE FOR IMPACTS ON CHILD AND FAMILY WELLBEING



Access to EI services, such as speech therapy to address language delays or physical therapy for motor challenges, can improve an infant's or toddler's developmental trajectory. These services may also prevent further delays and reduce the need for special education services or more intensive supports when children are older. Family-centered services can help parents and caregivers develop skills to interact with their infant or toddler in ways that will foster healthy development.

Evidence suggests children from families with lower incomes and communities of color do not have equitable access to EI services and often experience disruptions in the pathway from referral to evaluation and enrollment. To reduce disparities

in children's outcomes, states must ensure equitable access to EI services for children across racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic groups, as well as provide adequate funding for necessary services.

EI programs are administered differently in each state, beginning with the agency overseeing the program. Strategies to support EI services include expansion of eligibility requirements and increasing funding. States can also increase rates of recommended developmental screenings to ensure children who need services are identified.

EVIDENCE-BASED POLICYMAKING

The Prenatal-to-3 Policy Impact Center at Vanderbilt University analyzes rigorous evidence to determine which policies are proven to produce positive outcomes for young children, their families, and society. A comprehensive review of the evidence reveals that EI services are an effective strategy to improve child and parent health and developmental outcomes.

RIGOROUS STUDIES FIND THE FOLLOWING IMPACTS

EI services increase maternal confidence and satisfaction.

- Mothers of low birthweight, premature infants scored significantly higher on scales of maternal self-confidence and maternal role satisfaction.

EI services improve child development.

- Low birthweight and premature infants experienced an increase in cognitive and behavioral outcomes at age 3.
- Toddlers' receptive language skills improved in limited areas.

For more information on EI services:

- Refer to our comprehensive evidence review for additional detail on and citations for the above-referenced studies: <https://pn3policy.org/policy-clearinghouse/early-intervention-services/>.
- Refer to our Prenatal-to-3 State Policy Roadmap for state progress and variation: <https://pn3policy.org/pn-3-state-policy-roadmap-2024/us/early-intervention/>.
- Refer to our state policy lever checklist for necessary considerations to maximize the effectiveness of early intervention services: <https://pn3policy.org/state-policy-lever-checklist-ei/>.