

BABIES CAN'T WAIT

Why is early intervention important?

The brain develops rapidly from birth to age three. **Early intervention during this period can catch developmental delays before they become lifelong challenges.**

What is Babies Can't Wait?



**babies
can't
wait**

Babies Can't Wait (BCW) is Georgia's early intervention program available to **children ages zero to three years old with developmental delays and/or certain diagnosed conditions that have a high probability of resulting in delays.**¹ Housed in the Georgia Department of Public Health, Babies Can't Wait (BCW) brings together a team of specialists that deliver early intervention services, connect families to community resources, and offer training and referrals tailored to each child's needs.²

Who is served by BCW?



17,538

children were served in federal fiscal year 2023.³



An increasing number of children are referred and determined eligible each year.⁴

Demand for early intervention likely exceeds BCW's current capacity to serve children.

What services are available?⁵

- ✓ Evaluations and assessments
- ✓ Family training, counseling, and home visits
- ✓ Occupational therapy
- ✓ Physical therapy
- ✓ Psychological services
- ✓ Respite services
- ✓ Service coordination
- ✓ Special instruction
- ✓ Speech-language therapy
- ✓ Behavioral intervention
- ✓ Autism services

Anyone can refer a child to the program including, but not limited to:⁶



Parents



Childcare
Providers



Doctors

Families can receive a free developmental evaluation to determine eligibility for services and supports.⁷

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Funding and Financing

How is the program funded?

Federal funding is provided from the Office of Special Education Programs, Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. Babies Can't Wait also receives state funds, including a recent investment of more than \$550k to support the hiring and retention of Service Coordinators and Special Instructors.⁸

*Who pays for services?*⁹

- Services are first billed to the child's health insurance (Medicaid/private insurance, where applicable, and with parent permission)
- For what isn't covered, a sliding fee is determined, based on income and family size
- BCW serves as a payor of last resort, if needed

What are the steps to receive early intervention services?¹⁰

- 1** Referrals can be made by anyone including but not limited to a pediatrician, care provider, or a parent/guardian for assessment. Assessment of children must start within 45 days of referral.
- 2** Intake is conducted by BCW Service Coordinators (SC) and/or BCW Intake Service Coordinators (ISC) to assess potential delays or diagnoses. Early Intervention Coordinators (EIC) and Service Coordinators ensure that children receive assessments and services in a timely fashion and align with the care plan; they also ensure that timely and complete data is collected.
- 3** The Individualized Family Services Plan (IFSP) team, which includes parent(s)/guardian(s), service provider(s), Service Coordinator(s), and anyone the family deems necessary, create an IFSP based on the child's needs.
- 4** Children and families receive services for conditions based on their IFSP up until their 3rd birthday. Services are provided by BCW local agency staff and contracted providers (Physical Therapists, Occupational Therapists, Speech Language Pathologists, Special Instructors, and other BCW contracted providers.)
- 5** The child's progress is evaluated every six (6) months or as needed based on the needs of the child and the concerns of the IFSP team. BCW Service Coordinators work with providers and families to determine if additional services are recommended.
- 6** Transition plans can begin when a child is 24 months, but no later than 33 months. BCW Service Coordinators help families develop a plan to determine which next step will support the child's developmental needs after they have exited the BCW program. Options for next steps include preschool intervention programs, Head Start, child care, private therapy services, private preschool, or other community activities such as library story hours or Mommy & Me groups.¹¹

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Effectiveness of Babies Can't Wait ¹²

- **97.3%** received timely services
- **89.5%** received an initial evaluation, assessment, and initial Individualized Family Services Plan (IFSP) meeting within 45 days
- **96.2%** had IFSP developed with transition steps and services within timeline
- **100%** of Local Education Authorities (LEAs) were notified of a toddler's potential eligibility for Part B within timeline
- **96.2%** had a transition conference conducted within the required timeline
- **95.1%** received services in a home or community setting
- **83.7%** who entered early intervention below age expectations in the use of appropriate behavior to meet their needs substantially increased their behavior growth by age three or time of program exit

Challenges to the Success of the Babies Can't Wait Program

Babies Can't Wait operates in all 18 public health districts. However, contractor shortages, especially in rural areas, limit the program's ability to meet the needs of enrolled children. **Understaffing ultimately results in children/families receiving delayed services or not receiving the recommended services.**

RECOMMENDATIONS TO STRENGTHEN BABIES CAN'T WAIT

- Work closely with local agency staff, stakeholders, and community partners to continue assessing and addressing staff/program recruitment and retention issues.
- Streamline coordination and follow-up coordination/communication between referral source (e.g., physician) and program staff across the state.
- Continue to recruit providers to serve in all districts at numbers that meet the demand for services.
- Continue to offer telehealth as a platform for providing services to parents/caregivers where possible.
- Continue to explore whether there are early intervention services provided by the state which could be billed to Medicaid and/or private insurance (e.g., provider-to-provider consultations to coordinate services). If feasible, this would allow greater flexibility for IDEA Part C grant funds to support case management.



Babies Can't Wait is a federally regulated program under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, specifically, Part C of the law. The program is to be a statewide, coordinated, multidisciplinary interagency system that provides early intervention services for infants and toddlers, and coordinates developmental, educational, and community supports for those children. However, eligibility criteria may vary state to state.



REFERENCES FOR BABIES CAN'T WAIT

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- 2 Ibid.
- 3 Georgia Department of Public Health. Babies Can't Wait – Part C Early Intervention FFY23 Annual Performance Report Data. Retrieved September 5, 2025 from <https://dph.georgia.gov/media/86461/download>.
- 4 Georgia Department of Public Health. Babies Can't Wait, Early intervention, Ages 0-36 months. (May 2025.) Retrieved September 5, 2025 from <https://dph.georgia.gov/document/publication/bcw-program-brochure-eng-and-spa/download>.
- 5 Georgia Department of Public Health. Babies Can't Wait, Frequently Asked Questions. Retrieved September 5, 2025 from <https://dph.georgia.gov/document/publication/babies-cant-wait-faqs/download>.
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- 7 Ibid.
- 8 Georgia General Assembly. 2025. FY 26 Conference Committee Substitute. Retrieved October 2025 from [https://www.legis.ga.gov/api/document/docs/default-source/house-budget-and-research-office-document-library/2026-fiscal-year/fy_2026_conf_cmte_version_\(hb_68\).pdf?sfvrsn=7e9cf5e_2](https://www.legis.ga.gov/api/document/docs/default-source/house-budget-and-research-office-document-library/2026-fiscal-year/fy_2026_conf_cmte_version_(hb_68).pdf?sfvrsn=7e9cf5e_2).
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