



**FLORIDA DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES COUNCIL, INC.**

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## **Protect Early Steps, Florida's Part C Program**

Early Steps is administered by Children's Medical Services (CMS) in accordance with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Part C. The Early Steps System provides Florida's infants and toddlers from birth to 36 months who have a developmental delay, or a condition that places them at risk for developmental delay, with early intervention services and supports that are intended to improve a child's chances to develop to their full potential by achieving their developmental milestones. These milestones are essential to develop a child's ability to learn, speak, and move at critical periods that research shows lead to optimal abilities later in life.

The Florida Early Steps System, through collaborative community partnerships and investments, ensures that infants and toddlers with developmental disabilities, developmental delays, and their families achieve their full potential in the context of everyday relationships, activities, and places.

Funding per child is at a critical level that has forced many providers to withdraw participation or offer services that are inadequate in scope and frequency, therefore minimizing the impact that these services can provide. Without help from the Federal Economic Stimulus Package, Early Steps would not have been able to meet their Federal Match requirement (22%) and would not have been able to continue helping children during their critically important first three years.

Managed Care organizations have applied to provide therapy services for all children receiving Medicaid services in some areas including those children who receive Part C services. There is a question about whether a managed care entity could meet the requirements of providing therapy services in the natural environment of the home or child care center. Also, given the already inadequate Early Steps budget, how would managed care entities make money without limiting services?

This problem is complicated even further by the refusal of Medicaid and insurance providers to pay for any services that are habilitative and do not meet a narrow criteria of medical necessity. Also, federal regulations require that these therapy services be provided in their natural environment such as the home or child care center. Medicaid only reimburses travel costs for services performed in a medical setting. These factors strain the already tight Early Steps/Part C funding to take on the payment responsibility for these additional services.

Research has proven over and over again that the time to have the biggest impact on a child's health and functioning is in the early years. Longitudinal studies have documented the savings to society in the long run by taking care of our youngest citizens now.

**The Council encourages lawmakers to adequately fund the Part C Early Steps program to effectively serve all children with a developmental delay.**