



## FLORIDA DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES COUNCIL, INC.

124 Marriott Drive, Suite 203, Tallahassee, Florida 32301-2981

Phone (850) 488-4180 • Toll-Free (800) 580-7801

Fax (850) 922-6702 • TDD (850) 488-0956/(888) 488-8633

### Support Early Steps, Florida's Part C/Early Steps Program

The Council supports increased funding for the Early Steps Program which serves over 42,000 children and is celebrating 20 years of service to our youngest Floridians.

**The Council urges policymakers to require that the Individualized Family Support Plan (IFSP) be recognized as the authorizing document for medical necessity and Medicaid reimbursement for Part C Early Intervention services.**

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 Program 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 improve a child's chances to develop to their full potential by achieving their developmental milestones. Research shows that achieving these milestones is essential to developing a child's ability to learn, speak, and move at optimal levels later in life. Early intervention is designed to support families and caregivers in developing the competence and confidence to help their child learn and develop. Families and professionals work together to develop an Individualized Family Support Plan (IFSP) that is based on the unique needs of the child and the child's family.

In 2012-13, Florida provided these essential early intervention services to 42,243 children. This meant that an average of \$1267 dollars was spent per child. In 2013, \$3 million dollars was appropriated to pay for an increase in referrals of children with complex delays and disabilities. While the amount of spending per child has increased recently, Florida is still well below the national average of \$3,000 per child annually. This year the Council is going to ask legislators to increase funding to include more services for more children.

Stretching the dollars of Early Steps has been a challenge in the last several years. The program relies on being the payer of last resort, and looks to private insurance companies and Medicaid to pay for infant therapy services that are frequently included in a child's Individualized Family Support Plan. Federal regulations for Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) require that Early Steps pay for the services identified on the IFSP within 45 days of the documented need.

Approximately 70% of the children enrolled in Early Steps are Medicaid eligible and many may have therapy services that are documented in their IFSP that can be paid for by Medicaid. Medicaid services are offered through individual providers or Medicaid health plans. Medicaid will cover all medically necessary services for children under the age of 21. The therapies recommended go through a prior authorization process and may be denied if the services do not meet Medicaid's medical necessity definition. Currently, the IFSP is not recognized by Florida's health plans as an authorizing document. Early Steps' regulations prohibit any delay in therapies, so there are times when Early Steps pays for Medicaid-eligible services. **Designating the IFSP as the authorizing document will greatly increase the ability of Medicaid to pay for the medically needed services for children eligible under Medicaid.**

Cost-benefit analyses show that investing in early intervention services has measureable positive outcomes, with a rate of return as high as a seven dollar return on every dollar spent! For example, if school outcomes improve, fewer resources may be spent on grade repetition or special education classes. If improvements in school performance lead to higher educational attainment and subsequent economic success in adulthood, the government may benefit from higher tax revenues and reduced outlays for social welfare programs.