

# North Carolina Infant-Toddler Program Procedural Guidance

Reference: Infant-Toddler Program Services

## *Referral Process*

### **Introduction**

In order to receive services provided by the North Carolina Infant-Toddler Program, children must be referred and deemed eligible. Children between birth and age three (regardless of the child's age at the time of referral) are entitled to the full range of Infant-Toddler Program services, including referral, eligibility determination, Individualized Family Service Plan development, and service delivery. The North Carolina Infant-Toddler Program (ITP) must ensure that evaluation and assessment activities are completed and a meeting to develop the initial Individualized Family Service Plan must be conducted within forty-five (45) calendar days after a child is referred to the Infant-Toddler Program, unless the parent indicates otherwise. Any delays in meeting this 45-day requirement must be documented in the child's record. A copy of any notes documenting delay in meeting this requirement must be sent to the Children's Developmental Services Agency (CDSA) at the time of the notation for filing in the child's Infant-Toddler Program record maintained by the CDSA. There is a flow chart of the process for "Entry into North Carolina's Infant-Toddler Program" at the end of this Procedural Guidance.

The CDSA is responsible for developing procedures for handling referrals, designating a Service Coordinator, determining eligibility, and making arrangements for the initial Infant-Toddler Program evaluation, if needed. Any child who appears to meet the eligibility criteria for the Infant-Toddler Program must be referred. (*For additional information, see the Evaluation, Eligibility Determination and Eligibility Categories Procedural Guidance.*)

### **Procedures**

#### **1. Referral Sources**

- A. Referral sources are required to notify the CDSA within seven (7) working days of identifying children who may be eligible (i.e., most likely would meet one of the eligibility categories and, therefore, be entitled to the rights and services of the Infant-Toddler Program). Any source or method may be used to make referrals to the Infant-Toddler Program for infants and toddlers who may be eligible. Referral sources are strongly encouraged to inform families that they are making a referral and, whenever possible, obtain written parental authorization to share relevant information beyond the basic, allowable child find information with the CDSA. Thereby, families are more likely prepared to receive a contact regarding Infant-Toddler Program services. The referral source is required by state child find laws to make a child who may be eligible for the Infant-Toddler Program known to the CDSA even if the parent does not want the child to be referred. The fact that the parent is not interested in pursuing the child's eligibility and enrollment must be shared with the CDSA, who will make note of the notification, but take no action.

B. According to federal regulations, referral sources include: hospitals, physicians, the parent, child care programs, public schools, public health facilities, other social service agencies, other health care providers, and any other public or private agency receiving public funds. Written authorization by the parent is not required before the referral source notifies the CDSA of the child. North Carolina child find requirements allow the person or agency making the referral to share the child's name, date of birth, address, telephone number, parent's name, and the general fact that the child may be eligible for the Infant-Toddler Program. This information is needed to determine if the child is already receiving services from any local agencies and to make contact with the family. The information shared should only be basic facts that would aid in an initial conversation with the family. Details of specific diagnostic information about the child, family situations, sensitive issues, and information not relevant to the referral cannot be discussed without the parent's written authorization. Beyond the initial referral, the parent gives Written Parental Consent to proceed with the process of determining the child's eligibility for the Infant-Toddler Program and before any further discussion about the child and family can take place. The Children's Developmental Service Agency should notify referral sources about the status of their referrals to the Infant-Toddler Program using the *North Carolina Infant Toddler Program Status Update Form*. (For additional information, see *Policy on Procedural Safeguards and the Confidentiality and Prior Written Notice Procedural Guidance*.)

## 2. Visual or Hearing Disability

If there is a diagnosed or suspected visual or hearing disability, the CDSA must discuss the referral with the appropriate Office of Early Learning, Sensory Support program. This discussion must include a review of any existing evaluations and the planning of additional evaluations/assessments.

## 3. Service Coordinator Assignment:

Within two working days of receiving a referral, the CDSA will assign a Service Coordinator to assist the child and family. In designating this Service Coordinator, the CDSA should assign the most appropriate person in order to minimize the need for a change to a different Service Coordinator in the future. The assigned Service Coordinator must contact the parent immediately to introduce the Infant-Toddler Program.

### Initial encounters with families by Service Coordinators include:

- listening to the parent's concerns and preferences;
- explaining the Infant-Toddler Program;
- substantiating risk factors, if needed;
- giving and reviewing with the parent(s) a copy of the *Parent Handbook for the North Carolina Infant-Toddler Program*;
- reviewing *Infant-Toddler Program Child and Family Rights* with the parent(s);
- obtaining the parent's signature on the *North Carolina Infant-Toddler Program Prior Written Notice and Consent for Evaluation and Assessment Form* indicating the parent's consent to proceed with eligibility determination and acknowledgement that the parent has received a copy of the *Parent Handbook for the North Carolina Infant-Toddler Program* and that the *NC Infant-Toddler Program Child and Family Rights* have been reviewed with the parent(s);

- obtaining the parent’s written authorization on the *North Carolina Infant-Toddler Program Authorization to Disclose Health Information Form* to request information that will assist with eligibility determination and intervention planning (e.g., medical reports, previous evaluation reports) and to establish on-going communication with the referral source and the child’s primary physician;
- obtaining the parent’s written authorization on the *North Carolina Infant-Toddler Program Request for Restrictions on Use and Disclosure of Health Information Form*, if the parent wishes to place any such restrictions;
- discussing the initial multidisciplinary evaluation and having the parent sign the *NC ITP Prior Written Notice and Consent for Evaluation and Assessment Form* for the initial evaluation for determining eligibility and gathering information for intervention planning;
- gathering relevant demographic information;
- completing relevant sections of the *North Carolina Infant-Toddler Program Referral Form*;
- completing the *Financial Data Collection Form* used by the Infant-Toddler Program, and outlining with the parent the supports needed to proceed through the eligibility process.

#### 4. North Carolina Infant-Toddler Program Parent Handbook:

The *North Carolina Infant-Toddler Program Parent Handbook* (referred to as the “*Parent Handbook*”) explains the role and philosophy of the NC Infant-Toddler Program in family-friendly terms. It includes, but is not limited to:

- a description of the referral and eligibility determination process;
  - information about intervention planning and Infant-Toddler Program services and supports;
  - information about transition planning;
  - summary of child and family rights and procedural safeguards.
- A. A copy of the *NC ITP Parent Handbook* should be given to and reviewed with parents at the time of referral to the Infant-Toddler Program, prior to the initial multidisciplinary evaluation or assessment. The *Parent Handbook* is a tool to help explain key steps in the process throughout a child’s enrollment in the Infant-Toddler Program. For example, some information in the Parent Handbook may be helpful to review with families during an annual IFSP meeting or during transition planning.
  - B. The *Parent Handbook* includes a summary of child and family rights and procedural safeguards information. An official notice of rights and detailed definitions of these rights is available for families in the *North Carolina Infant-Toddler Program Notice of Child and Family Rights*. (For additional information, see *Policy on Procedural Safeguards and Notice of Rights Procedural Guidance*.)
  - C. A *Community Resource* sheet and a *Parent Contact* sheet are posted on [www.bearly.nc.gov](http://www.bearly.nc.gov) for Service Coordinators to share with parents to document the family’s contacts with service providers and others. It is recommended that Service Coordinators help parents organize a notebook on the child that can hold the *Parent Handbook*, *Notice of Child and Family Rights*, health records, evaluation results, medical reports, letters, notices of meetings, the Individualized Family Service Plan, and other important documents.

- D. The *Parent Handbook* is available in English, Spanish, Hmong, Arabic (Iraqi dialect), Korean, Vietnamese and Chinese (Mandarin). These translations may be downloaded from [www.bearly.nc.gov](http://www.bearly.nc.gov).

## 5. Referrals Deemed Inappropriate

The CDSA may decide that a referral to the Infant-Toddler Program is inappropriate prior to conducting an initial Infant-Toddler Program evaluation. The CDSA may conclude that the identified conditions are not associated with developmental concerns and that early intervention services are not needed. The CDSA must record the receipt of the referral and clearly document the reason for determining the referral to be inappropriate. This decision along with its justification must be documented on the *NC ITP Eligibility Determination Documentation Form* for the CDSA. This decision must also be communicated in writing to the parent using the *North Carolina Infant-Toddler Program Prior Written Notice Form* and to the referral source using the *NC ITP Referral Update Form* for the referral source.

If a referral is deemed inappropriate, the CDSA should discuss the need for service coordination with the parent and make a referral to other program(s) or community provider(s), as appropriate. Written authorization from the parent to make this referral is required. The CDSA should share information with the parent about other community resources, as appropriate.

## 6. Timelines

The 45-day timeline begins on the day the CDSA receives a referral on a child who may be eligible. The 45 days are calendar days. *For example, if the referral date is June 3, the Individualized Family Service Plan must be developed by July 18.*

### Families' Right to Proceed at Their Own Pace

Each parent understands and follows the process of completing evaluations, eligibility determination, and the Individualized Family Service Plan differently and according to his own pace. Parents dictate the pace at which completion of these requirements occurs by their action or inaction. The intention of the 45-day timeline for completion of the process is to expedite these necessary actions by staff in order to serve the family and child's best interests.

Sometimes the 45-day expectation is not in the best interest of the child and family. A parent may alter the pace and timeframe for completion of requirements by requesting a delay in the process. A request for the delay does not stop the 45-day timeline; instead, the process is extended beyond the 45-day expectation. The CDSA will not be held responsible for not meeting the timeline, if families specifically request a delay, cannot be located, or consistently do not respond to reasonable attempts to contact them. Parent requests for a delay, missed appointments, and/or lack of response to contacts must be documented and filed in the child's record at the time of the notation.

The expectation of the Infant-Toddler Program to complete the eligibility determination, the initial Infant-Toddler Program evaluation, and the initial Individualized Family Service Plan meeting within the 45-day timeframe remains unless the parent changes this expectation by verbal or written request or by missing appointments or other signs of disinterest in the process.

A parent who chooses not to enroll his child in the Infant-Toddler Program should be informed that the law does not protect them should the parent feel that a particular service or entitlement under the Infant-

Toddler Program has been denied them. The parent must be fully informed of the consequences of his choice not to enroll and his right to request services at a later date. For example, a child who is not enrolled in the Infant-Toddler Program is not granted the transition assurances for Preschool Program placement entitled to by children enrolled in the Infant-Toddler Program, including guaranteed placement, if eligible, on the child's third birthday.

If the parent chooses not to enroll his child in the Infant-Toddler Program or the child ceases to be enrolled at some point, the CDSA should discuss the need for other services or supports with the parent and make a referral to other programs(s) or another community provider(s), as appropriate. Written authorization from the parent is required to make this referral. The CDSA should share information with the parent about other community resources, as appropriate.

## 7. Special Considerations

### A. When the Parent is Not Engaged in the Referral and Eligibility Determination Process

When a parent is not engaged in the Infant-Toddler Program referral and eligibility determination process, the Service Coordinator must make numerous and varied attempts to contact the parent (e.g., phone calls, home visits, mail, requesting assistance from the referral source, the child's physician, relatives, or other community resources). The *NC ITP Referral Update Form* should be used to solicit the referring program's help in contacting the family. If unsuccessful in contacting the parent or resolving issues related to the parent's lack of participation, the Service Coordinator must send the parent a letter by mail that:

- i. reviews what the Infant-Toddler Program is and how it may be beneficial to the child and family;
- ii. states who referred the child and why;
- iii. includes a copy of Child and Family Rights under the Infant-Toddler Program;
- iv. states that attempts to involve the parent have been unsuccessful and briefly describes these attempts;
- v. requests that the parent contact the Service Coordinator within ten (10) calendar days, if the parent wishes to discuss continued involvement and the receipt of services, and
- vi. informs the parent that he may contact the CDSA at any time in the future about resuming participation in the Infant-Toddler Program.

If the parent does not respond to this letter, the Service Coordinator must document the lack of response in the child's record and stop the referral and eligibility determination process. The Service Coordinator must inform the family of their rights regarding confidentiality and the referral using the *NC ITP Rights at Referral Letter*. If the parent does respond, but states that he does not want to proceed with the referral and eligibility determination process at this time, the Service Coordinator must document the parent's decision in the child's record and send the family the *NC ITP Rights at Referral Letter*. A copy of all written communication to the parent and notes of any other attempts to communicate with the parent must be filed in the child's record. The *NC ITP Referral Update Form* should be used to notify the referring program of any decisions made regarding eligibility.

**B. Initiation of Urgent Interventions**

Under certain circumstances, Infant-Toddler Program services may commence for an eligible child and his family before the completion of the initial Infant-Toddler Program evaluation and the development of the initial Individualized Family Service Plan. The parent, the Service Coordinator, and the service providers who have initiated such services must develop an Interim Individualized Family Service Plan. *(For additional information, see Procedural Guidance on the Individualized Family Service Plan.)*

**C. Children with Extended Hospital Stays**

A child under age 3 who is hospitalized has the same Infant-Toddler Program rights to referral, eligibility determination, Individualized Family Service Plan development, and service delivery as a child living with his family in the community. The CDSA must work with hospitals to ensure mechanisms are in place for making referrals, sharing information with families, maintaining effective and efficient communication, conducting evaluations, planning and delivering appropriate services to the child and family, and ensuring appropriate implementation of Infant-Toddler Program requirements. While all Infant-Toddler Program assurances must be met for these children and their families, services cannot be billed to third party payers or public/private insurance by non-hospital providers while the child is an inpatient in the hospital.

If extended hospitalization occurs at the time of the birth of the child, upon establishing reasonable expectation that the child will survive, hospitals are required to make a referral to the appropriate CDSA within seven working days of identifying a child who may be eligible. The CDSA in the child’s county of residence is responsible for ensuring that all aspects of the Infant-Toddler Program are implemented. If personnel are available in the hospital to help facilitate the referral and eligibility processes, the assigned Service Coordinator may enlist their help with the activities that are a part of initial encounters with the parent. The CDSA must work with hospitals to ensure that the parent is provided with information about the Infant-Toddler Program, including his child and family rights, so that he can make an informed decision regarding the pursuit of eligibility determination.

**D. When a Family Moves within the CDSA Catchment Area**

If a family moves during the referral and eligibility determination process, the CDSA must ensure that this process continues without interruption and proceeds as smoothly as possible for the child and family. The 45-day timeline requirement remains. If it is necessary to change the designation of the Service Coordinator, this must be done with sensitivity to the family’s needs and with the least amount of disruption as possible.

**E. When a Family Moves from One CDSA Catchment Area to Another**

If a family moves during the referral and eligibility determination process, both Children’s Developmental Services Agencies must ensure that this process continues as smoothly as possible for the child and family. All information collected related to referral and eligibility determination must be copied and the copies sent immediately to the receiving CDSA. A new Service Coordinator must be designated and must contact the parent immediately to develop and implement plans for proceeding with eligibility determination. The 45-day requirement should be

honored to the greatest extent possible by the new CDSA. *(For additional information, see Procedural Guidance on Record Transfers.)*

**F. When a Child Moves From Another State**

If a child moves into North Carolina from another state where he was eligible for Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, it is necessary to go through the North Carolina Infant-Toddler Program referral and eligibility determination process, as described in this Procedural Guidance because states have different eligibility criteria or definitions. If the evaluation and assessment information from the other state is less than six months old, is complete, and available for use, the requirements to complete an initial Infant-Toddler Program evaluation may not be necessary. *(For additional information, see Procedural Guidance on Evaluation, Eligibility Determination and Eligibility Categories.)*

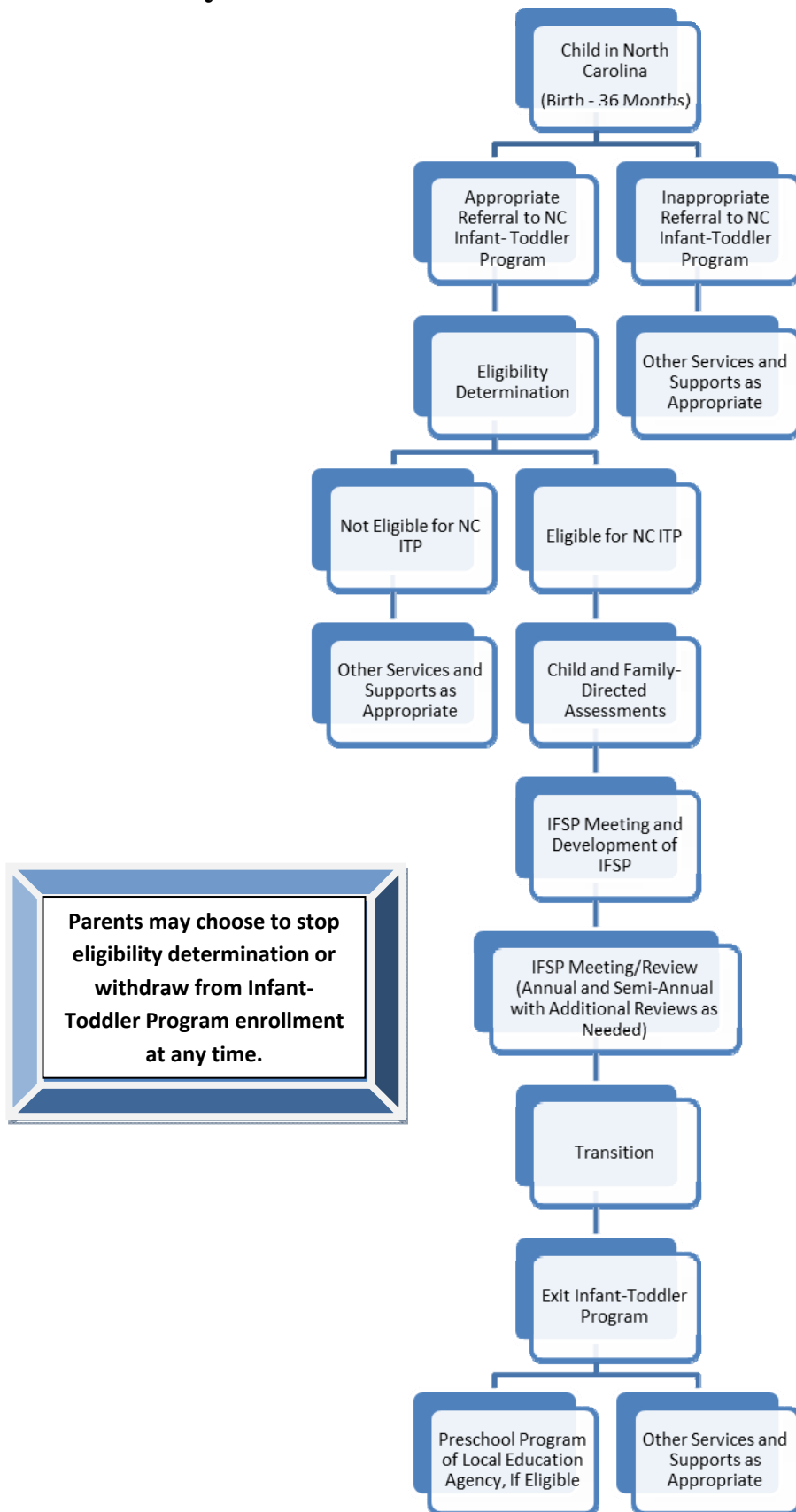
**G. When Children are Referred to the Infant-Toddler Program Close to Their Third Birthday**

Children referred to the Infant-Toddler Program close to their third birthday (typically 45 to 90 days prior to the child’s third birthday) are entitled to Infant-Toddler Program enrollment, including Individualized Family Service Plan development and service delivery. When referral does occur close to the third birthday, it is recommended that the Infant-Toddler Program fully explain to the parent the following: the eligibility determination process, available services, and child and family rights, including rights to transition and service availability on the third birthday and similar information regarding the Preschool Program.

If the parent decides not to pursue eligibility determination for the Infant-Toddler Program, but does wish to pursue Preschool Program services, the established Preschool Program referral procedures, including planning for necessary evaluations, should be initiated instead of those for the Infant-Toddler Program. If the parent wishes to be considered for participation in the Infant-Toddler Program, the existing Infant-Toddler Program eligibility determination procedures are to be followed. Evaluation planning should consider the Preschool Program entry requirements to avoid subsequent duplicative evaluations. Because of the child's age, transition will be a major intervention focus on the Individualized Family Service Plan. *(For additional information, see Policy on Transition from the Infant-Toddler Program, Transition Procedural Guidance, and the current Guiding Practices for Early Childhood Transitions in NC.)*

The CDSA should discuss the need for services and supports after age three with the parent and make a referral(s) to other supports and services, as appropriate. Written authorization from the parent to make appropriate referral(s) is required.

# Entry into the North Carolina Infant-Toddler Program



**Parents may choose to stop eligibility determination or withdraw from Infant-Toddler Program enrollment at any time.**