

Public Awareness and Child Find System

Introduction

The North Carolina Infant-Toddler Program (ITP) actively seeks to identify children and their families who might be eligible for the Infant-Toddler Program. Major components of this effort include:

- a public awareness program,
- a central directory of resources, and
- a comprehensive child find system.

Public Awareness

The ITP develops and disseminates information focusing on early identification of infants and toddlers with disabilities to all primary referral sources, especially hospitals and physicians. This information is to be given to parents, especially to inform parents with premature infants and infants with other physical risk factors associated with learning or developmental complications, on the availability of early intervention services under the Infant-Toddler Program and of services under Preschool services for children with disabilities. In addition to providing such information to hospitals and physicians, the Infant-Toddler Program targets other referral sources such as homeless family shelters, clinics, and other health-related offices, public schools, and officials and staff in the child welfare system.

Public awareness activities focus on the Infant-Toddler Program and on the early identification of children who are eligible to receive early intervention services under the Infant-Toddler Program.

Activities inform the public about:

- the state's early intervention program;
- the state's child find system including its purpose and scope, how to make referrals, and how to access a comprehensive evaluation and other early intervention services; and
- the state's central directory.

In addition to state-supported activities, local community agencies are obligated by the federal law to participate in public awareness activities. Many of these activities parallel the state's efforts in the distribution or presentation of public awareness materials.

Central Directory of Resources

As a component of the statewide system of early intervention services, North Carolina maintains a central directory that includes information on early intervention services, resources, and experts available in North Carolina. The directory also contains information about research and demonstration projects being conducted in North Carolina.

The Family Support Network of North Carolina, under contract with the Early Intervention Branch, maintains a computerized directory of services for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers with special needs and their families as required by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. Resource Specialists with the Central Directory of Resources provide information and referral services to families and professionals. The Central Directory of Resources can be accessed by calling (800) 852-0042 or at www.fsnnc.org.

The Central Directory of Resources is equipped to respond to callers who speak Spanish or who are deaf or hard of hearing. The Central Directory of Resources is a major resource for parents and agencies for identifying and accessing service providers, organizations, and other resources at the local, state and national levels.

Child Find

North Carolina has a comprehensive child find system, consistent with Part B, including a system for making referrals to service providers. This system includes timelines, provides for participation by primary referral sources, and ensures rigorous standards for appropriately identifying infants and toddlers with disabilities for services that will reduce the need for future services.

Federal regulations and state statutes allow referral sources to share a minimal amount of personally identifiable information during child find (i.e., making a child known to the Infant-Toddler Program or for the purpose of complying with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act). Information that can be shared during child find is limited to child's name, date of birth, parent's name, address, and telephone number.

Child Find efforts include coordination with private and public referral sources, hospitals, and physicians. Elements of this system include mechanisms to:

- ensure that all infants and toddlers who are eligible for services are identified, located and evaluated;
- determine which children are, and which children are not, receiving needed early intervention services;
- ensure that appropriate early intervention services, based on scientifically based research, are available to all infants and toddlers with disabilities and their families, including Indian infants and toddlers with disabilities and their families residing on a reservation geographically located in the state; infants and toddlers with disabilities who are homeless and their families; and infants and toddlers with disabilities who are wards of the state;
- ensure compliance with the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA). CAPTA requires states to have provisions and procedures for referring children under the age of three to early intervention services funded by Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) who are the 'subject' in substantiated cases of child abuse or neglect or are identified as affected by illegal substances abuse or withdrawal symptoms resulting from prenatal drug exposure;
- coordinate child find activities among state agencies to avoid unnecessary duplication of effort; and
- be used by primary referral sources for referring a child to the ITP for evaluation and assessment. Primary referral sources include, but are not limited to, hospitals, physicians, parents, childcare programs, local educational agencies, and other social service or health care providers. Primary referral sources employed by public or private agencies receiving public funds are required to refer a child to the early intervention system no more than seven working days after a child is identified as being possibly eligible for the Infant-Toddler Program.