

A Family's Journey Through the Early Identification and Intervention System

Many families face challenges obtaining services for their children with developmental delays and mental health concerns. California's low developmental screening rate and complicated early identification and intervention system lead to service delays. Critical months in a young child's life can pass by as families navigate the system.

We created the following example to illustrate common challenges and delays families in California face when seeking services. Our example family interacts with five different systems over the course of 15 months. The child finally receives services by his 2nd birthday, only after high levels of parent advocacy and community support.

| Child's Age | Family Experience | System |
|-------------|---|---------------------------------------|
| 9 months | Parents notice their son hasn't started babbling the way many of his peers do. Concerned, they bring it up at his 9-month well-child visit, where the provider tells them not to worry and that their son is likely "on his own schedule." | Primary care |
| 15 months | The child only says a couple of words, and hasn't started walking yet. His child care provider expresses concern, and encourages the parents to ask for a developmental screening at his next well-child visit. | Community-based developmental support |
| 18 months | The provider completes the ASQ:3 and notes delays in communication and gross motor skills, then makes a referral to the Regional Center. | Primary care |
| 20 months | The family applies for Regional Center services and it takes two months to receive an assessment. The child is found to be eligible for Early Start. An Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) is developed and the Regional Center refers the family to the Medi-Cal managed care plan. Although the child is eligible for Early Start, Regional Centers cannot pay for services if they can be covered through health insurance. | Regional Center |
| 21 months | It takes a while for the managed care plan to make a determination. | Managed care plan |
| 21 months | Frustrated, the family calls their local Help Me Grow for advice, and is informed that Regional Centers must provide early intervention services while they wait to hear back from Medi-Cal. | Community-based developmental support |
| 22 months | The family presses the Regional Center to provide services, and the child starts receiving speech and physical therapy through Early Start. | Regional Center |
| 23 months | The managed care plan eventually determines that the speech therapy is "medically necessary" but the physical therapy is not. | Managed care plan |
| 24 months | The child continues to receive physical therapy through Early Start, however the speech therapist is not in-network with the child's managed care plan. Therefore, the family must seek another speech therapist in the community that takes the child's insurance. The family calls around and is able to get an appointment in six weeks with a provider who is a 40-minute drive away. | Regional Center & Managed care plan |