

# SYSTEMS OF CARE

FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH

## SYSTEM PROFILE: REGIONAL CENTER - EARLY START\*

The Department of Developmental Services (DDS) oversees the coordination and provision of services and supports for most Early Start infants and toddlers. The Early Start program (California Early Intervention Services Act [CEISA], Government Code, Title 14, Sections 95000-95029.5) is California's early intervention program for infants and toddlers with disabilities and their families. Early Start is a multiagency effort by the Department of Developmental Services, in collaboration with the California Department of Education. Early Start services are available statewide and are provided in a coordinated, family-centered system and may be accessed through regional centers and local educational agencies. A child diagnosed with a visual impairment, hearing impairment, or severe orthopedic impairment, or any combination of these (also known as low incidence disabilities) is served by the local educational agencies (LEAs) and the school district makes the eligibility determination.

This document focuses on the Early Start services available through regional centers.

Early Start services and supports are offered through a statewide network of 21 contracted, private, non-profit community agencies, known as regional centers that develop, purchase, manage and coordinate local services and resources. Regional centers have offices throughout California to provide a local resource to help find and access the many services available to infants and their families.

\*This document provides a summary of the Regional Center - Early Start System. It is not an exhaustive review of all legal authorities and does not constitute legal advice.

## OVERVIEW

Our goal is simple: our programs must meet the needs of the children and youth we serve. These are our collective children, and they all deserve the very best.

We recognize that it is our obligation to ensure that the services we are providing are coordinated, timely, and trauma-informed. We must come together as one government to break down silos and build a culture that is focused on delivering services that are person-centered and not program-centered.

## PURPOSE

As a resource to state, county, and local staff, we developed system profiles that provide an overview of the services offered by our various systems that all serve children and youth.

This is our compendium of resources available to children and youth served by are various systems. The system profiles outline how eligibility is determined, what the denial appeal processes entail, how the system interacts with other systems or programs, how information is shared, and how referrals are made

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Eligibility for Early Start is established through evaluation and assessment completed by a regional center. Anyone can make a referral to Early Start, including parents, medical care providers, neighbors, family members, foster parents, social workers, and child care providers by calling the local regional center to request an evaluation for the child. Early Start Family Resource Centers, who work in partnership with regional centers and others, offer parent-to-parent support and local resource information.

In Early Start, parent is defined as (complete definition found in 34 Code of Federal Regulations [CFR], Section 303.27):

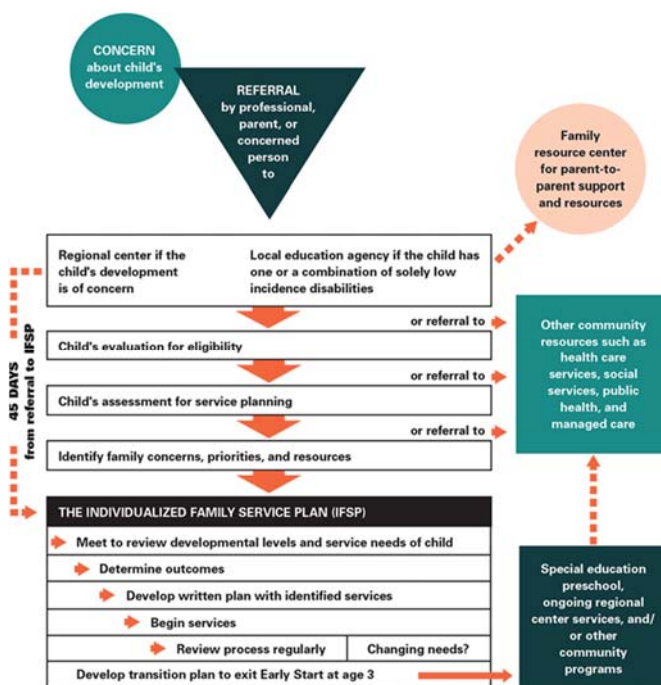
- (A) A biological or adoptive parent of a child;
- (B) A foster parent;
- (C) A guardian authorized to act as the child’s parent to make educational decisions;
- (D) A person acting in place of a parent (such as a grandparent or stepparent with whom the child lives, or a person who is legally responsible for the child’s welfare);
- (E) A surrogate parent who has been assigned in accordance with 34 CFR Section 303.422. (The State’s procedures for assigning a surrogate parent may be found in Title 17, California Code of Regulations [CCR] Section 52175.)

Intake phone numbers for each regional center, information about Family Resource Centers, and a listing of regional center locations and areas served can be found online at:

- <https://www.ceitan-earlystart.org/central-directory/>
- [https://www.dds.ca.gov/EarlyStart/ES\\_FR C.cfm](https://www.dds.ca.gov/EarlyStart/ES_FR C.cfm)
- <https://www.dds.ca.gov/RC/RCList.cfm>

After contacting the regional center, a regional center staff member is assigned to complete the process of determining eligibility. Within 45-days of referral, the regional center shall:

- Assign a service coordinator to assist the family through evaluation and assessment procedures.
- Obtain parental/legal guardian consent for evaluation and assessment.
- Schedule and complete evaluations and assessments of the child and family.
- If an infant or toddler is eligible for early intervention services, an Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) will be developed that addresses the strengths, and needs of the infant or toddler, parental concerns, and early intervention services.
- Identify on the IFSP the early intervention services that are to be provided in the child’s natural environment or appropriate setting.



## ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

Infants and toddlers from birth to age 36 months may be eligible for early intervention services through Early Start if, through documented evaluation and assessment, they meet one of the criteria listed below:

- Have a developmental delay of at least 33% in one or more areas of cognitive, communication, social or emotional, adaptive, or physical and motor development including vision and hearing; or
- Have an established risk condition of known etiology, with a high probability of resulting in delayed development; or
- Be considered at high risk of having a substantial developmental disability due to a combination of biomedical risk factors of which are diagnosed by qualified personnel, or
- When a multidisciplinary team, as defined in 34 CFR Section 303.24, determines that the parent of the infant or toddler is a person with a developmental disability and the infant or toddler requires early intervention services based on evaluation and assessment.

A list of regional center services and descriptions is available in 11 languages online at:  
<https://www.dds.ca.gov/RC/RCSD.cfm>

## DENIAL OF ELIGIBILITY

The parent/legal representative and/or child welfare social worker that requested the assessment is notified of the regional center/local educational agency's determination.

If denied eligibility, the parents/legal representatives will receive information about their right to request a due process hearing, mediation and/or file a State complaint if they disagree with the regional center/local educational agency's decision.

## APPEAL PROCESS

The regional center/local educational agency should be notified, if the parent/legal representative provides approval. There are three separate processes in place for addressing disagreements which may arise, including eligibility, or the provision of early intervention services (including type and amount of services). Additional information on the dispute resolution processes may be found at:

<https://www.dds.ca.gov/Complaints/Home.cfm>

### Early Start Mediation Conference Request.

This is a voluntary process, on the part of both parties, used to resolve disagreements between parents and a regional center or a local educational agency related to Early Start, including eligibility. Mediation may be used as a first option for resolution or may be requested at any time during a due process hearing or the complaint process. The mediation conference must be completed within 30 days from the receipt of the request by the Office of Administrative Law.

### Early Start Due Process Hearing.

This process is used to resolve disagreements between parents and a regional center or local education agency related to Early Start, including eligibility. This hearing must be completed within 30 days from receipt of the request by the Office of Administrative Law. The decision is final unless appealed to the superior court of appropriate jurisdiction or civil action is brought by any aggrieved parties.

### Early Start State Complaint Process.

This process is used to investigate and resolve any alleged violation of federal or state statutes or regulations governing the program. DDS, and if the complaint

involves a local educational agency, the California Department of Education, investigates the allegations and issues a written decision to all parties within 60 days of receipt of the complaint. (See Title 17, CCR Sections 52170-52174)

## PROGRAM INTERACTIONS

Regional centers rely on families to share information about what services their child has received or is receiving through other programs. With family consent, regional center staff will contact other programs to assist the family in navigating those programs. State law (Section 4659 of Welfare and Institutions Code) does not allow regional centers to pay for services for which another agency has responsibility, unless necessary to prevent delays in timely provisions of appropriate services (not including medical treatment).

**Medi-Cal Managed Care** – Regional centers may recommend that parents access Medi-Cal services for their child through a managed care plan if the child is determined eligible for Medi-Cal through the County and is enrolled in a plan. All regional centers are required to have Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) with managed care plans to facilitate service delivery for all Medi-Cal eligible individuals. If a regional center wants to assist an individual in requesting services, the regional center can call the specific plan’s Member Services number or receive help from the Department of Health Care Services, Office of the Ombudsman at (1-888-452-8609).

**Medi-Cal Fee-For-Service** – Regional centers may recommend that parents access these services if their child is determined eligible for Medi-Cal through the County and the provider is enrolled in Medi-Cal. A complete list of Medi-Cal fee-for-service providers is

located at the California Health and Human Services Agency’s Open Data Portal under [“Profile of Enrolled Medi-Cal Providers”](#).

**Medi-Cal Specialty Mental Health/Substance Use Disorder Services** – Regional centers may recommend that parents access these services for their child through the County behavioral health system. All regional centers are required to have MOUs with County behavioral health systems. A managed care plan may also make a referral for the individual to the County behavioral health system.

**Schools** – At age 36 months, Early Start children may transition to a local educational agency, who administers Special Education services. Some children may also be determined eligible for regional center services under the Lanterman Act. When a child is between the ages of 24 and 30 months, the Early Start service coordinator explains to the family that a transition conference will occur no later than 90 days before the child’s third birthday. The conference may occur up to nine months before the child’s third birthday, at the discretion of all parties. A school district representative will be invited to attend the transition conference.

**Child Welfare Services** - Regional centers may participate in Child Family Team meetings as appropriate. Section 4643.5(d) of Welfare and Institutions Code contains procedures and timelines that apply to a child who transfers from one regional center’s catchment area to another when there is an order for foster care placement, the child is awaiting foster care placement, or the child is placed in out-of-home care through a voluntary placement.

## INFORMATION SHARING

Unless parents/legal representatives provide consent, regional centers do not directly

receive health screening information from primary care physicians or other providers. Regional centers rely on families to share information about what benefits, services or screenings their child has received or is receiving through other programs. When a family provides consent, regional center staff will interact with other programs serving the child and/or family.

DDS does not prescribe how information is shared with other public agencies. Instead, this is left to the discretion of regional center agencies. For this reason, the process for sharing information with other public programs may vary across regional centers and the catchment region. Some county agencies (County, MHP, Child Welfare, etc.) have developed local MOUs that also address how information will be shared, or have developed other local protocols for sharing information.

Regional centers receive Medi-Cal eligibility information from DDS as part of the operation of the various waiver programs that fund services.

## REFERRALS

The regional center service coordinator provides the referral information for generic services directly to the family. With the permission of the family the regional center makes direct contact with an agency or organization to assist the family. The referral may be noted in case notes or in the IFSP.

When the IFSP identifies a Purchase of Service referral, where services are arranged and paid for by the regional center, the referral is provided directly to the service/provider and it is tracked through regional center financial and case management systems.

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Our Systems of Care work has been accelerated by the implementation of Assembly Bill 2083 (Chapter 815, Statutes of 2018), which requires each county to develop and implement a Memorandum of Understanding outlining the roles and responsibilities of the various local entities that serve children and youth in foster care who have experienced severe trauma.

The legislation is focused on the child welfare system, but can and must be expanded to look at children and youth served by various other systems.

The legislation calls for the establishment of a Joint Interagency Resolution Team to provide guidance, support, and technical assistance to counties with regard to trauma-informed care to foster children and youth.

We have identified the mission of the State Restitution Team to be:

1. Promote collaboration and communication across systems to meet the needs of children, youth and families;
2. Support timely access to trauma-informed services for children and youth; and
3. Resolve technical assistance requests by counties and partner agencies, as requested, to meet the needs of children and youth.

For additional system profiles, including mental health services, rehabilitation services, developmental services and education services, please visit our website at [www.chhs.ca.gov](http://www.chhs.ca.gov).