



MAKE THE
**FIRST FIVE
COUNT**®

Our Nation's Children at Risk:

A State-by-State Report on Early Intervention



MakeTheFirstFiveCount.org



Message to Readers:

Easter Seals is pleased to present ***Our Nation's Children at Risk: A State-by-State Report on Early Intervention***. The new report gives us a sense for how well each state takes care of its youngest children with disabilities and delays. The unfortunate news: infants and toddlers in nearly every state continue to fall behind, many will never catch up. Yet, with the right investment in treatment and therapy before the age of five, we can change the state of early intervention for millions of families across the country.

While there are many choices for families seeking early identification and early intervention services, the federally funded Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Part C program offers all families services designed to help them facilitate their infant or toddler's development. It's a program created to help young children with disabilities or developmental delays catch up with their peers without disabilities, or enhance their development so they can better learn and grow. In October 2011 we celebrated IDEA's 25th anniversary, yet the legislation has never been fully or adequately funded.

The Report: States by the Numbers

The individual state profiles within the report provide a comprehensive overview of the current status of federal and state funding for early intervention services through the Part C program of IDEA in each of the 50 states and the District of Columbia. Easter Seals looked at funding levels compared not only to the number of children (ages 0-3) served under Part C every year, but also how many children fail to receive the proper screenings to identify their special need and how many children are at risk for developmental delays, autism or disabilities in each state.

It's also important to note, funding cuts or limitations have forced states to make difficult choices to limit the number of children who are eligible for Part C services to those children with only the most significant disabilities. Our report identifies the number of children who may have mild to moderate disabilities, developmental delays or who are at risk for developmental delays who could benefit from such services -- beyond those children who are currently eligible.

And finally, for each state, we shared at least one local story of a young child who is truly thriving because of the early services and support he or she received -- a real example of how the lives of so many families can change for the better.

Nationally, approximately 2.67 percent of children under the age of three are enrolled in the Part C program, and yet, data from the National Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center indicates nearly 13 percent of all children under the age of three should be served, using current eligibility criteria. Data from the US Maternal and Child Health Bureau indicate nearly 20 percent of all children could benefit from early identification and early intervention services.

There are some bright spots. States including Massachusetts, Rhode Island, New Mexico, Wyoming, New York and New Hampshire serve more than 4 percent of their population

through the Part C program of IDEA. These six states reach far more children with disabilities and delays than other states, with more young children able to access the critical services and supports they need when they can most benefit. These states are on the right track, and should serve as an example to others, but we know it's just the beginning.

We're not doing enough for our nation's youngest and most vulnerable children, especially in states that serve fewer than 2 percent of their population including Georgia, Alabama, Tennessee, Mississippi, Montana, Missouri, Arkansas and the District of Columbia.

You can Make the First Five Count for Young Children

Easter Seals is sharing the report across the United States, engaging in discussions about the importance of early intervention with federal, state and local legislators, community leaders, educators, other nonprofits, media, and our volunteers, families and staff. The data and stories serve as a factual, and humanized, resource for parents and advocates of young children and those looking to learn more about early intervention. We hope others will join us and speak up – especially in the 45 states who serve less than 4 percent of the population – lend their voice, and ask policy makers to invest more in our young children's futures.

Funding for programs that help kids with special needs is already inadequate – and with major budget cuts up for consideration in Congress, millions more could fall through the cracks. In just one year in the U.S., more than one million children go undiagnosed, forced to cope with learning and health difficulties that are often completely treatable.

Easter Seals created *Make the First Five Count* to advocate for children at risk for developmental delays or disabilities and ensure they get the support they need to be school-ready and build a foundation for a lifetime of learning. Through *Make the First Five Count*, Easter Seals is calling on Congress to protect and grow funding for Part C by \$100 million, for a total of \$539 million, in the years to come.

In the first year of our campaign, Part C funding was increased. Thanks to your voice, we achieved 5 percent of our goal.

If you believe all kids deserve a chance to learn, build lifelong skills, and achieve their dreams, speak out today!

Become a part of the solution. Join us at **MaketheFirstFiveCount.org**.