

2016 Early Steps Legislation Overview

The 2016 Legislature passed [CS/HB 7053](#), which, among others, creates the Early Steps program and delineates the roles and responsibilities of the Department of Health and local Early Steps providers. Among others, the bill:

- requires the information clearinghouse administered by the Department of Health (DOH) to:
 - provide comprehensive information to educate parents and providers about early intervention services;
 - refer to children with developmental disabilities or delays as children with “unique abilities”;
 - provide education and training to parents and providers through the clearinghouse; and
 - promote public awareness of intervention services available to parents of children with unique abilities;
- renames the Florida Infants and Toddlers Early Intervention Program as the Early Steps program;
- requires DOH to administer the Early Steps program;
- establishes goals of the Early Steps program to, among others:
 - integrate information and coordinate services with other programs serving infants and toddlers;
 - enhance the development of infants and toddlers with disabilities and delays;
 - increase awareness among parents, health care providers, and the public of the importance of the first three years of life for the development of the brain;
 - maintain the importance of the family in early intervention services;
 - provide comprehensive and coordinated services; and
 - ensure timely evaluation of infants and toddlers and provide individual planning for intervention services;
- requires DOH to, among others:
 - develop a statewide plan for the program;
 - ensure that local program offices educate hospitals providing Level II and Level III neonatal intensive care about the program and the referral process for evaluation and intervention services;
 - establish standards and qualifications for service providers used by the program;
 - develop uniform procedures to determine eligibility for the program;
 - provide a statewide format for individualized family support plans
 - promote interagency cooperation with the Medicaid program, the Department of Education, and programs providing child screening;
 - provide guidance to local program offices for coordinating Early Step program benefits with other programs such as Medicaid and private insurance;
 - provide a mediation process and, if necessary, an appeals process for parents competitively procure local offices to administer the Early Steps program;
 - establish performance measures and standards to evaluate local Early Step offices; and
 - provide technical assistance to local Early Step offices;



Legislative Link

A legislative update provided by the United Way of Florida

- establishes the following as eligibility determinates for the Early Steps program:
 - having a developmental delay based on informed clinical opinion and an evaluation using a standard evaluation instrument which results in a score that is 1.5 standard deviations from the mean in two or more of the following domains: physical, cognitive, communication, social or emotional, and adaptive;
 - having a developmental delay based on informed clinical opinion and an evaluation using a standard evaluation instrument which results in a score that is 2.0 standard deviations from the mean in one of the following domains: physical, cognitive, communication, social or emotional, and adaptive;
 - having a developmental delay based on informed clinical opinion and an evaluation using a standard evaluation instrument which results in a score that is 1.5 standard deviations from the mean in one or more of the following domains: physical, cognitive, communication, social or emotional, and adaptive;
 - having a developmental delay based on informed clinical opinion; or
 - being at risk of developmental delay based on an established condition known to result in developmental delay, or a physical or mental condition known to create a risk of developmental delay;
- requires the Early Steps offices to, among others:
 - evaluate a child within 45 days after referral;
 - notify parents if the child is eligible for services and provide an appeal process to those parents whose child is found ineligible;
 - make interagency agreements with local school districts;
 - provide services directly or procure early intervention services;
 - provide services in a natural environment to the extent possible;
 - develop an individualized family support plan for each child served in the program;
 - assess the progress of the child in meeting the goals of the individualized family support plan;
 - provide service coordination to ensure that assistance for families is properly managed;
 - make agreements with local Medicaid managed care organizations and local private insurers; and
 - provide data required by DOH to assess the performance of the program;
- designates the Florida Interagency Coordinating Council for Infants and Toddlers as the state interagency coordination council required under federal law.

For additional information, please contact
the United Way of Florida at: (850) 488-8276.

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