

# Babies Can't Wait



Babies Can't Wait (BCW) is Georgia's evidence-based, community-centered early intervention program that provides screening, treatment, and support services for certain infants and toddlers (from birth to age 3) with disabilities and developmental delays.



A child's brain develops extremely rapidly from birth to age three. **This is a critical window of opportunity to detect and address developmental delays before they become significant barriers to healthy development.** BCW staff work with physicians to identify children showing signs of certain degrees of developmental delays so that needed supports can be provided early on – and long-term development challenges can be prevented or mitigated.

## WHO QUALIFIES FOR SERVICES?

BCW serves children 0-36 months who have a documented\* developmental delay or chronic health condition that leads to developmental delays.



A free developmental evaluation is given to families to determine eligibility for services and supports under the program.

Services provide support and resources to assist family members/caregivers to enhance children's learning and development in the child's natural environment (e.g., home or community setting).



Anyone can refer a child to Babies Can't Wait<sup>2</sup>



Parents



Childcare Providers



Doctors

## HOW THE PROGRAM IS FUNDED

**babies  
can't  
wait**

is funded by state and federal dollars, and housed within



## HOW SERVICES ARE PAID FOR



First, services are billed to the child's health insurance (where applicable and with parent permission)



A sliding fee is determined based on income and family size



Services are then paid for by the BCW program as payor of last resort, if needed

## CHILDREN SERVED BY BABIES CAN'T WAIT

Approximately  
**19,000**  
children are served\*\*  
every year in Georgia



The number of children that are referred and eligible is increasing each year<sup>1</sup>



It's likely that more children are in need of services than BCW can currently serve, given existing constraints

\* According to the Georgia Department of Public Health, children must score 2 standard deviations from the mean in one area of development, or 1.5 standard deviations in two areas of development on one of the approved standardized eligibility test tools. If a child does not show a documented delay per the test results, the team can determine eligibility based on informed clinical opinion.

\*\*All children received Service Coordination or case management services to guide them through the program and to assist in developing the Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP). Should a child need additional services determined by the IFSP team, it is added to the plan and coordinated by the Service Coordinator.

## STEPS TO RECEIVE EARLY INTERVENTION SERVICES

### 1

Referrals are given by a pediatrician, care provider, or a parent or guardian for assessment. Assessment of children must start within 45 days of referral.

### 2

Intake is conducted by BCW coordinators in order to assess potential delays or diagnoses. Early Intervention Coordinators (EIC) and Service Coordinators ensure that children receive assessments and services in a timely fashion and align with the care plan; they also ensure that timely and complete data is collected.

### 3

Public health care coordinators create an Individualized Family Services Plan (IFSP) based on each child's needs. These coordinators serve all 18 public health districts.

### 4

Children and families receive services for conditions based on their IFSP up until their 3rd birthday. Services are provided by BCW staff and contracted physical therapists, speech therapists, and other providers.

### 5

The child's progress is evaluated annually or as needed based on their IFSPs. BCW coordinators work with providers and families to determine if additional services are needed.

### 6

Transition plans begin at 27 months. BCW coordinators help develop a plan with parents to determine which next step will meet the child's needs after they are no longer eligible for BCW. Options for next steps include private physical therapy, behavioral therapy, or other health services. Transitions may also include creating an educational plan comparing private child care, public preschool, and Head Start.

## CHALLENGES TO THE SUCCESS OF THE BABIES CAN'T WAIT PROGRAM

While Babies Can't Wait is implemented in all 18 public health districts, the program has encountered challenges with having enough contractors, particularly in rural areas of Georgia, to meet all the service needs of the children enrolled. **Understaffing ultimately results in children/families not receiving the support they need.**

## RECOMMENDATIONS TO STRENGTHEN THE BABIES CAN'T WAIT PROGRAM

- Assess and address staff retention issues.
- Prioritize coordination and follow-up coordination/communication between referral source (e.g. physician) and program staff.
- Recruit providers to serve in all districts at numbers that meet the demand for services.
- Leverage telehealth for providing services to parents/caregivers where possible.
- Continue to explore whether there are early intervention services provided by the state which could be billed to Medicaid and/or private insurance (e.g. provider-to-provider consultations to coordinate services). If feasible, this would allow greater flexibility for IDEA Part C grant funds to support case management.

*Babies Can't Wait is a federally regulated program under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, specifically, Part C of the law. The program is to be a statewide, coordinated, multidisciplinary inter-agency system that provides early intervention services for infants and toddlers, and coordinates developmental, educational, and community supports for those children. However, eligibility criteria may vary state to state.*

## Sources for Babies Can't Wait

1 Georgia Department of Public Health. (Feb 2018.) Babies Can't Wait: Early Intervention, Ages 0-36 months. Retrieved on November 2, 2020 from <https://dph.georgia.gov/document/publication/bcw-program-brochure-eng-and-spa/download>

2 Ibid