

Babies Can't Wait (BCW), which is housed in the Georgia Department of Public Health, is Georgia's early intervention program available to **children ages zero to three years old with disabilities and developmental delays.**<sup>1</sup> Through BCW, a team of multidisciplinary healthcare professionals assesses, educates, and implements a family service plan to help ensure children receive every opportunity to fulfill their potential.<sup>2</sup>

## Why is early intervention important?



The brain develops 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 closely with physicians and healthcare providers to identify children showing signs of developmental disabilities or delays, so that needed supports can be provided early on, and long-term developmental challenges can be prevented or mitigated.



**babies can't wait**

## Who qualifies for services?

Family members/caregivers receive support and resources to enhance learning and development in the child's natural environment (e.g., home or community setting).<sup>3,4</sup> Anyone can refer a child to the program including, but not limited to:<sup>5</sup>



Parents



Childcare Providers



Doctors



Families can receive a free developmental evaluation to determine eligibility for services and supports.<sup>6</sup>

## Children Served by Babies Can't Wait



**17,151** children were served in FY21<sup>7</sup>



An increasing number of children are referred and eligible each year<sup>8</sup>

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



## Funding and Financing

### How is the program funded?

Federal funding is provided from the Office of Special Education Programs, Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. Babies Can't Wait also receives state funds.

### Who pays for services?<sup>9</sup>

- Services are first billed to the child's health insurance (where applicable and with parent permission)
- A sliding fee is determined based on income and family size
- BCW serves as a payor of last resort, if needed

## Effectiveness of Babies Can't Wait<sup>10</sup>

- **98.9%** received timely services
- **99.3%** received an initial evaluation, assessment, and initial Individualized Family Services Plan (IFSP) meeting within 45 days
- **99.6%** had IFSP developed with transition steps and services within timeline
- **100%** of Local Education Authorities (LEAs) were notified of a toddler's potential eligibility for Part B within timeline
- **99.8%** had a transition conference conducted within the required timeline
- **90%** received services in a home or community setting
- **84.2%** who entered early intervention below age expectations in the use of appropriate behavior to meet their needs substantially increased their behavior growth by age three or time of program exit

## What are the steps to receive early intervention services?<sup>11</sup>

- 1 Referrals** can be made by anyone including but not limited to a pediatrician, family member, care provider, or a parent/guardian for assessment. Assessment of children must start within 45 days of referral.
- 2 Intake** is conducted by BCW Service Coordinators (SC) and/or BCW Intake Service Coordinators (ISC) 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 The Individualized Family Services Plan (IFSP) team**, which includes parent(s)/guardian(s), service provider(s), Service Coordinator(s), and anyone the family deems necessary, create an IFSP based on the child's needs.
- 4 Children and families receive services for conditions based on their IFSP up until their 3rd birthday. Services are provided by BCW local agency staff and contracted providers** (Physical Therapists, Occupational Therapists, Speech Language Pathologists, Special Instructors, and other BCW contracted providers.)
- 5 The child's progress is evaluated every six (6) months** or as needed based on the needs of the child and the concerns of the IFSP team. BCW Service Coordinators work with providers and families to determine if additional services are recommended<sup>12</sup>
- 6 Transition** plans begin at 27 months. BCW Service Coordinators help families develop a plan to determine which next step will support the child's developmental needs after they have exited the BCW program. Options for next steps include **private therapy services, private childcare, preschool special education classroom, Head Start/Early Head Start, or staying at home**. This includes creating an educational plan to compare all transition options.

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 interagency 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.

## 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 receiving delayed services or not receiving the recommended services.**

### Recommendations to Strengthen Babies Can't Wait

- Work closely with local agency staff, stakeholders, and community partners to assess and address staff/program recruitment and retention issues.
- Streamline coordination and follow-up coordination/communication between referral source (e.g., physician) and program staff across the state.
- Continue to recruit providers to serve in all districts at numbers that meet the demand for services.
- Continue to offer telehealth as a platform 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.





# References for Babies Can't Wait

Suggested citation: Voices for Georgia's Children. (2023). Fact Sheet: Babies Can't Wait. Voices for Georgia's Children. <https://adobe.ly/3sXnH3x>.

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- 2 Georgia Department of Public Health. Babies Can't Wait. Accessed November 17, 2023. <https://dph.georgia.gov/babies-cant-wait/families>.
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- 4 Georgia Department of Public Health. BCW Services. Accessed November 17, 2023. <https://dph.georgia.gov/babies-cant-wait/bcw-services>.
- 5 Georgia Department of Public Health. "2019 BCW Program Brochure: Early Intervention, Ages 0-36 months". Accessed November 17, 2023. <https://dph.georgia.gov/document/publication/bcw-program-brochure-eng-and-spa/download>.
- 6 Georgia Department of Public Health. Eligibility for BCW. Accessed November 17, 2023. <https://dph.georgia.gov/babies-cant-wait/families>.
- 7 Georgia Department of Public Health. Babies Can't Wait – Part C Early Intervention FFY21 Annual Performance Report Data. Accessed November 28, 2023. <https://dph.georgia.gov/document/document/ffy21-state-apr-and-local-program-performance/download>.
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- 9 Georgia Department of Public Health. Professional Communication, November 2022.
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- 11 Georgia Department of Public Health. Babies Can't Wait: Steps for Success, Transition 3. Accessed November 17, 2023. <https://dph.georgia.gov/document/publication/bcw-transition-3-brochure-english/download>.
- 12 Georgia Department of Public Health. Babies Can't Wait: FAQ Retrieved on November 17, 2023. <https://dph.georgia.gov/document/publication/babies-cant-wait-faqs/download>.