

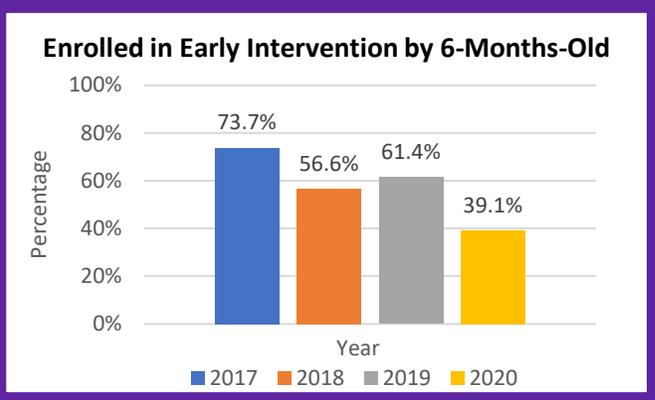
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## Background

Early intervention (EI) services are critical to speech, language, and social development for children who are identified as deaf or hard of hearing. The national EHDI Guidelines include early intervention enrollment by 6 months of age. In Florida, the primary referral source for early intervention is the IDEA, Part C Program, also known as Early Steps.

## Aim

To collaborate with the IDEA, Part C Program to increase the percentage of infants who were identified as deaf or hard of hearing enrolled in early intervention by 6-months-old from a baseline of 61.4% in 2019 to 65% in 2020.



## Method

FL EHDI performed a series of rapid Plan Do Study Act (PDSA) quality improvement cycles to improve collaboration with the IDEA, Part C Program to increase enrollment in early intervention by 6 months of age. Rapid PDSA will continue through 2022 to increase timely enrollment in EI.

## Plan

- Executed a data user agreement with IDEA, Part C.
- Hired an EHDI EI liaison to lead effort.
- Included objective in strategic plan.
- Educated EHDI staff on IDEA, Part C Program policies.
- Developed interview questions for virtual meetings with local IDEA, Part C Program offices.
- Invited local IDEA, Part C staff to attend the National EHDI Conference funded by FL EHDI and to schedule a virtual collaboration meeting.

## Do

- Held virtual meetings with 15 local IDEA, Part C Program offices.
- Implemented priority QI activities, including:
  - Developed an IDEA, Part C Referral and Resource Spreadsheet for hearing loss follow-up.
  - Implemented a process to contact families prior to making the referral to IDEA, Part C.
- EHDI parent consultants met with IDEA, Part C Family Resource Specialists (FRS) to:
  - Educate on hearing loss and tools.
  - Provide an overview of EHDI, including follow-up.
  - Educate on available resources statewide.

## Study

- Conducted a statewide trend analysis on process measures and objective performance which indicated:
  - A delay between hearing loss reporting and referrals to IDEA, Part C.
  - Missing data for up to 10% of referrals made to IDEA, Part C.
  - Enrollment disparities for Black and Hispanic children referred to IDEA, Part C.

## Act

- Transitioned the referral process to EHDI hearing loss follow-up staff.
- Created a referral feedback loop between programs.
- Prioritized referrals for children based on age during surges in hearing loss diagnoses.
- Shared process and objective performance data with local IDEA, Part C Program offices to identify best practices and additional QI strategies.

## Impacts on Collaboration and Engagement

- Twenty-eight local Part C staff attended the 2021 EHDI virtual Conference, up from zero the previous year.
- Part C staff actively engage with EHDI parent consultants for:
  - Additional contact information for families.
  - More information on diagnoses.
  - Parent consultant support to engage families.
- Local IDEA, Part C Program staff are participating in professional development and regional learning communities hosted by the EHDI Parent Support vendor.

## Conclusion

Preliminary data indicate that 39.1% of infants with hearing loss enrolled in EI by 6-months-old in 2021.

Potential contributing factors to the decrease in timely enrollment include:

- Delays in diagnosis as a result of COVID-19 backlogs and case surges.
  - EHDI rates of diagnosis by 3-months-old decreased by 36.8% from 2019 to 2020.
- Significant decreases in IDEA, Part C enrollment rates in state fiscal year 2020/2021.
- Inefficiencies in previous EHDI referral process.
- Previous communication gaps between EHDI and local IDEA, Part C Program offices.

## Stakeholder Feedback

*EHDI services helped greatly, getting me in contact with the right person [at Early Steps]. It [Early Steps] has been amazing.*  
Wiline Profil, Mother

*FRS feel better prepared to have conversations with families who have children with hearing differences and are better equipped with resources.*  
Marisol Rose, Early Steps State Parent Consultant

*The open flow of communication between the two groups promotes a shared knowledge of services available statewide.*  
Miranda Nerland, EHDI Parent Consultant

*The collaboration has opened the lines of communication which will help ensure we are reaching the families we need to.*  
Kathy Carroll, M.S., CCC/SLP, Manager, Gold Coast Early Steps

## Future Collaborations

- EHDI will provide quarterly data reports to local IDEA, Part C Program offices to:
  - Identify additional QI activities.
  - Identify best practices for timely enrollment and services.
- EHDI will support ongoing EI professional development.