

Investing in the Professionals who Support Young Children with Disabilities

Babies Can't Wait Special Instructors and Service Coordinators

The Importance of Early Intervention

The first three years of life represent the most rapid period of brain development. During this time, young children with disabilities and developmental delays develop physical, social, and emotional skills that will serve them for the rest of their lives. Providing comprehensive and medically necessary services to a child in the earliest years can alter their lifelong trajectory, ameliorating the need for more intensive services later on. It is critical that early intervention services are thorough, timely, and high-quality to support young children's healthy development.



Key Facts about *Babies Can't Wait*, Georgia's Early Intervention Program:

- *Babies Can't Wait* (BCW) provides therapeutic services, family support, and care coordination to young children (from birth until a child's third birthday) to satisfy Part C of the federal Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act (IDEA).
- BCW is administered by the Georgia Department of Public Health (DPH).
- BCW is funded with federal dollars, along with allocations to DPH and the Department of Community Health (DCH).
- DPH relies on contracted providers to serve enrolled infants and toddlers.

Babies Can't Wait Services

- **Service Coordination:** Required by federal regulations, Service Coordinators support a family with case management and care coordination. For example, service coordinators may support families referred to BCW from the NICU, connecting them with therapeutic services, medical equipment, and other resources (e.g., child care) before discharge.
- **Special Instruction:** BCW provides coaching for caregivers to support their child's healthy development. Special Instructors, trained in early childhood development, help families embed tailored strategies into daily routines. Special Instructors focus on overall development, attention, behavior, and play skills. Medicaid reimburses the BCW program for 50% of special instruction services, up to a set amount.
- **Therapies:** Licensed providers, such as speech-language pathologists, occupational therapists, physical therapists, and behavioral support staff, offer therapeutic support for children and coaching for caregivers in home and community settings. These therapists contract with BCW to provide services and bill private insurance, Medicaid, families, and sometimes BCW for reimbursement.

► The Challenge

During the 2024 legislative session, lawmakers approved reimbursement rate increases for therapists (speech-language pathologists, occupational therapists, and physical therapists) who work with *Babies Can't Wait*. These rates increased on average by fifty percent. Unfortunately, Service Coordinators and Special Instructors did not receive a rate increase. In fact, they have not seen a rate increase in decades.

In rural counties, Special Instructors and Service Coordinators are some of the only providers available to serve children enrolled in BCW and can support families while they wait for therapeutic services. The state is at risk of losing these crucial members of the early intervention workforce.

► The Opportunity

To support the retention and recruitment of *Babies Can't Wait* Service Coordinators and Special Instructors, GEEARS recommends a 50% reimbursement rate increase for these professionals, providing parity across the full network of BCW contracted providers.

The Ask

Service Coordinator
Rate Increase:
\$2,898,256

Special Instructor
Rate Increase:
\$1,288,874

Total Request:
\$4,187,130

*all amounts are estimated



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