



Early Start Family Voices: What California Families Need

Preliminary Findings | Infant Development Association of California, 2026

Executive Summary

The preliminary findings from ongoing family interviews and surveys of 21 California families, conducted by IDA Interns from UCLA, addressed the importance of a strong and effective early intervention system. Families emphasized that early intervention services work to improve children's developmental outcomes, while highlighting needs for improvement in communication efforts and addressing information gaps and resources. Families also highlighted the importance of supportive relationships with service coordinators and greater consistency across regional centers. IDA urges policy makers and service providers to strengthen outreach efforts, improve communication, and provide a more equitable and standardized system of care for our families.

Key Themes from Interviews

Early Intervention Works

Families reported significant improvements in their children's development after receiving Early Start services. They described their child reaching new developmental milestones and gaining independence.

"We've seen significant improvement, and we owe it all to early intervention. If we didn't do early intervention, we would have no idea how to help him, and he would not have made the progress that he has made thus far." -Rose, mother of 4-year-old

Service Coordinator

Relationships are Fundamental

Families reported increased confidence in their ability to navigate the system when they formed supportive relationships with service coordinators. Conversely, parents reported feeling overwhelmed when service coordinators were inconsistent or when staff turnover was high.

"She [the service coordinator] really helps me stay regulated. She stays on top of re-evaluations and making sure I am up to date." -Anonymous mother of 18-month-old

Greater Inter collaboration Between Locations is Needed

Families reported a need for better coordination across regional centers and service providers. A more standardized system of evaluation, services delivery, and open communication could streamline information sharing and improve continuity of services throughout California.

"Early Start... should be equal across the board... Nobody should have more services or less services because of the region they're in." - Anonymous, mother

Knowledge Gaps Persist

Families identified gaps in their awareness and understanding of Early Start Services. Nearly every family reported not knowing where the nearest regional center was, how to receive an evaluation, or what services their child may be eligible for.

"If we really want to make a difference in these children's lives, we need to be transparent, we need to be able to tell them, 'These are all the services that your child may qualify for.' ...If families don't know, how are they going to ask?" -Wendy, mother of 10-year-old

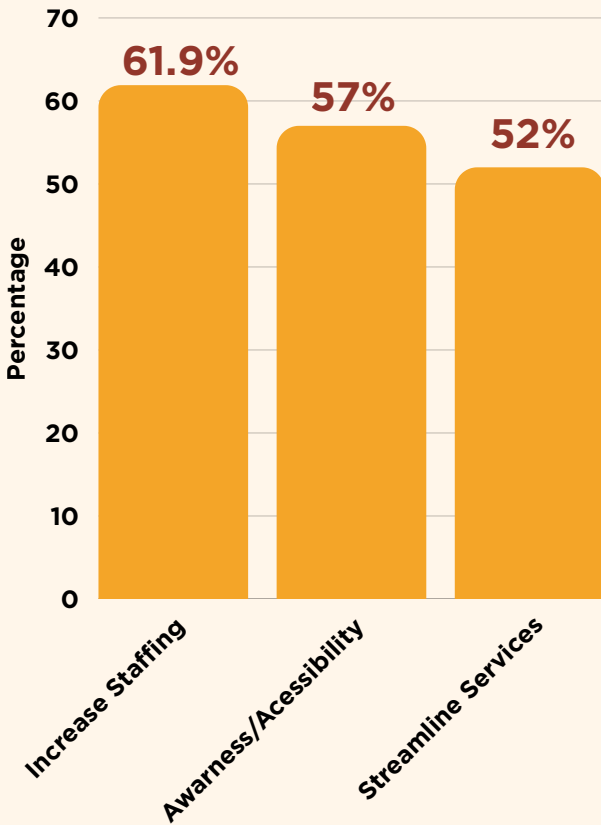


Early Start Family Voices: Actions & Resources for Early Intervention

Why Early Intervention Matters

Early intervention services provide an array of therapies, both in and outside of the home to help build families' capacities to support their children with developmental delays from birth to age three. These services are required by law to be accessible under Part C of the Individuals With Disabilities Act (IDEA)¹. Intervention during these earliest stages of development are significantly effective as the brain is the most adaptable during a child's first three years of life². Early intervention services are more cost-effective long term, saving states across the US an estimated \$7.6 million to \$68.2 million by helping prevent up to 3,000 children per state from needing to access special education supports during their K-12 schooling³.

Families' Top Recommendations to Legislators



Advocate Increase Funding for Regional Centers to Hire, Train, and Appropriately Compensate Service Coordinators:

61.9% of interviewed families reported that the quality of their experience was strongly influenced by their service coordinator. Increased funding can help regional centers maintain adequate staffing, reduced caseloads, and strengthen coordination between service coordinators and providers.

Promote Positive Partnerships Between Regional Centers and Service Providers to Increase Accessibility for Families:

52% of interviewed families reported greater need for accessibility across services. Transparent communication between regional centers, coordinators, staff, and families can increase the speed and effectiveness of services.

Create Outreach Initiatives to Access Early Intervention Resources:

57% of interviewed families reported a lack of transparent information regarding Early Start services, eligibility and available supports. Expanding outreach and family education efforts can ensure families better understand the early start process, funding, available services, navigating the system, and access timely evaluations and support for their children.

References & Resources

1. Division for Early Childhood. (n.d.). [Be Part of Early Intervention](#). Home Page.
2. CDC. (2026). [Why Act Early if You're Concerned about Development? Learn the Signs. Act Early.](#)
3. [Early Intervention Services - Prenatal-to-3 State Policy](#). (2021). Prenatal-to-3 Policy Impact Center.

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