Only 6% of infants and toddlers are receiving Early Intervention, while experts estimate that at least 13% need services.

Anticipating their first rate increase in 20 years, Early Intervention programs have been struggling to recruit and retain qualified staff and to enroll eligible children from a statewide waiting list.

Hispanic children and low-income children experience delays qualifying for and enrolling in EI, receive services less consistently, and then make less developmental progress.

Under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), young children with developmental challenges are entitled to Early Intervention and Preschool Special Education services.
Many Rhode Island families:

- Don’t know how to access Early Intervention or Preschool Special Education and often do not receive reliable information or support from people in the community— including health care providers, child care providers, and school districts.
- Don’t know that they can call an Early Intervention provider or their school district directly to request a screening or evaluation whenever they have concerns about their child’s development.
- Have scheduling challenges and struggle to access services because they are working long hours and have very limited paid time off.
- Don’t see people from their own culture/race or meet people who speak their home language providing Early Intervention or preschool special education services.
- Have great difficulty finding and paying for quality child care for children with special needs.

Under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), young children with developmental challenges are entitled to Early Intervention and Preschool Special Education services.
RHODE ISLAND POLICYMAKERS SHOULD:

- Ensure Medicaid rates and funding for Early Intervention and First Connections are sufficient so programs can pay competitive wages, eliminate waiting lists, and help more infants and toddlers with developmental challenges.
- Launch and sustain a multi-lingual public awareness and outreach campaign to educate new parents, child care programs, and community members about Early Intervention and how to access services.
- Create and staff a multi-lingual statewide helpline for families that need help getting evaluations, starting, or maintaining access to early childhood IDEA services.
- Take concrete steps to increase and maintain diversity in the Early Intervention workforce, including designing and funding an education pipeline to help bilingual people and people of color to earn degrees, credentials, and professional licenses needed to deliver services.
- Fix problems that lead to inequitable access by providing flexible schedules and offering services during non-traditional hours, helping families communicate with their employers about scheduling needs, and strengthening partnerships with formal and informal child care systems.

Under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), young children with developmental challenges are entitled to Early Intervention and Preschool Special Education services.
RHODE ISLAND POLICYMAKERS SHOULD:

- Make sure school districts have adequate funding and staffing to complete screenings for all children, complete evaluations of all children with developmental concerns, and deliver high-quality services to all eligible children in an inclusive setting based in the community or in the district.

- Launch and sustain a multi-lingual public awareness and outreach campaign to educate parents, child care programs, and community members about Preschool Special Education and how to access services.

- Create and staff a multi-lingual statewide helpline for families that need help getting evaluations, starting, or maintaining access to early childhood IDEA services.

- Take concrete steps to increase and maintain diversity in the Preschool Special Education workforce, including designing and funding an education pipeline to help bilingual people and people of color to earn degrees, credentials, and professional licenses needed to deliver services.

- Fix problems that lead to inequitable access by providing services across district lines in child care, preschool, Head Start, and Pre-K programs chosen by families. Expand public funding for child care and early learning programs so all three- and four-year-olds have access to a high-quality, affordable early learning program.

Early Childhood IDEA Programs in Rhode Island: Priorities to Improve Access to Preschool Special Education

Under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), young children with developmental challenges are entitled to Early Intervention and Preschool Special Education services.