

# Increase Funding for Early Intervention (EI) by \$40 Million in FY25

Illinois' Early Intervention (EI) program ensures that infants and toddlers with 1) developmental delays or disabilities, 2) diagnosed medical conditions with a substantial likelihood of delay or 3) other factors that put them at risk of substantial delay have the best chance for healthy development. Today, EI provides a range of family-centered developmental and social-emotional services, including speech and language, occupational and physical therapies and social work services to **more than 26,000 infants and toddlers across Illinois**. EI, authorized under federal law, is an entitlement for families and serves children from all income levels and in every county across the state.

These critical services are shown to improve developmental outcomes for young children, support families to better meet their child's developmental needs, and reduce future health and educational costs to our communities and the state by minimizing the need for special education services. Importantly, EI experiences are most effective when provided during the first three years of a child's life – a unique window of time in which the developing brain is most capable of change.

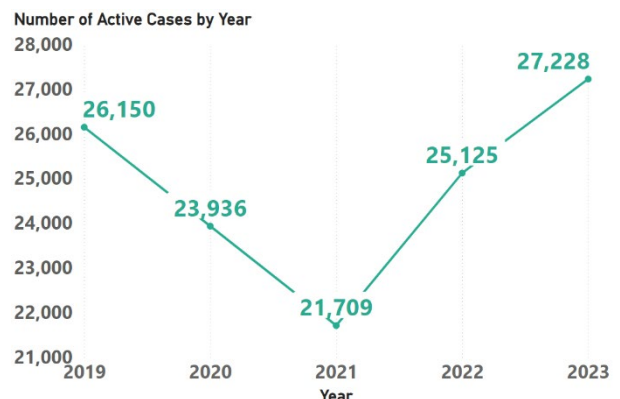
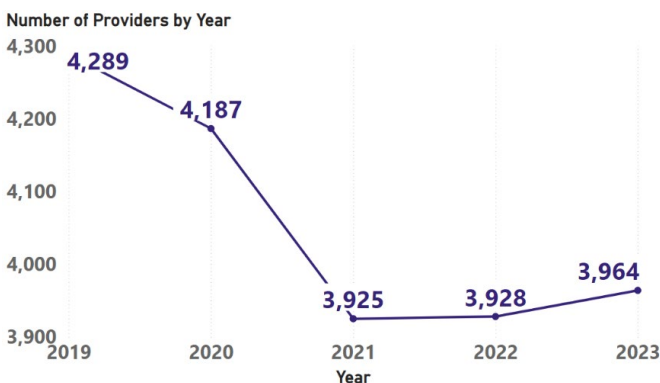
**26,730 Children**  
are receiving critical EI services each month.

**3,806 Children**  
are in the process of intake/evaluation and eligibility decisions for services.

## THE EI WORKFORCE IS IN CRISIS.

With the tight labor market and continued inflation, Illinois EI providers continue to leave the program. Most EI providers, who work as fee-for-service independent contractors and not full-time state staff, must cover their own health insurance and travel costs – both of which are increasing – and are not compensated for missed or canceled appointments. These challenges, among others, are leading providers – many of whom have advanced degrees – to leave EI professions and work instead in hospitals, schools, private practices or other settings. Lagging reimbursement rates also make it difficult to keep up with cost-of-living increases.

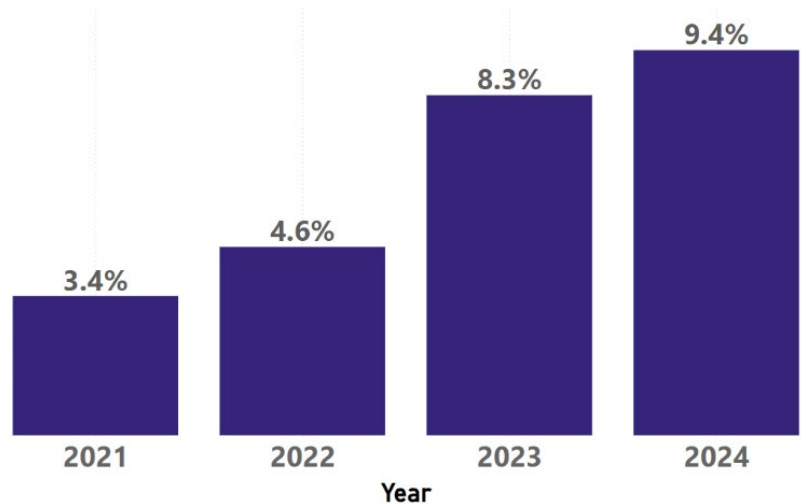
To its credit, the Pritzker administration announced a 10% rate increase for providers last July. The challenge, of course, is that this still does not keep pace with lagging rates over the past two decades or significant inflation over the last calendar year. Nor does it keep pace with increasing health care and travel costs. In fact, the state would need to raise provider reimbursement rates by **at least 25%** just to account for inflation – which does not even address measures necessary to decrease transportation, health insurance and billing costs.



## SERVICE DELAYS HAVE MORE THAN DOUBLED SINCE FY22.

While the EI program's caseload has returned to pre-pandemic levels, the loss of EI personnel is having a substantial impact on the provision of timely services for families. The state is required to initiate services within 30 days of parental consent to the Individual Family Service Plan (IFSP). Yet, waiting lists for services are historically high, primarily due to a shortage of providers.

In Fiscal Year 2022, 4.6% of families experienced a service delay, which is comparable to delays seen in 2019 pre-pandemic. **That percentage has now more than doubled to historic levels, with 9.4% of children waiting for services in FY24.**



In addition to the thousands of families currently on waiting lists for the EI services they are entitled to receive, many families are experiencing barriers at every step of the process. Illinois law mandates that families referred to EI receive a response within two business days and have an evaluation completed, eligibility determined and IFSP created within 45 days. Hundreds of families are waiting every month to complete the intake, evaluation and IFSP process. This does not account for the unknown number of families who are referred to the program but do not receive a timely response or are unable to connect to the EI system at all to begin the intake process.

## THE TIME TO ACT IS NOW – BABIES CAN'T WAIT.

The Illinois General Assembly has an opportunity this year to address the Early Intervention program's stubbornly high service delays and an impending workforce crisis. While we were grateful for a \$40 million increase in funding for the program in last year's state budget, unfortunately, **more funding is necessary to help ensure equitable access to necessary developmental services and supports that are known to dramatically improve a child's lifelong trajectory.**

We are asking the Illinois General Assembly to include \$40 million in funding for the state's Early Intervention program in the Fiscal Year 2025 budget approved this spring. An [online petition](#) started by providers shortly after the Governor's budget address has already garnered thousands of signatures, calling for legislators to invest \$40 million to support Early Intervention for FY25 which would allow the Illinois Department of Human Services to address immediate and future program needs and provide such critical services to children who have or are at risk for significant developmental delays. Funding can be used immediately to increase compensation for credentialed providers and improve the referral and evaluation process for families.

Without immediate action, more therapists will leave the program entirely, causing further harm to kids and families. **The time to act is now.**

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