

# North Carolina Infant-Toddler Program Procedural Guidance

Reference: Infant-Toddler Program Services Policy

## *Referrals*

### **Introduction**

In order to receive services provided by the North Carolina Infant-Toddler Program, children must be referred and deemed eligible. Children between birth and age three (regardless of the child's age at the time of referral) are entitled to the full range of Infant-Toddler Program services, including referral, eligibility determination, Individualized Family Service Plan development, and service delivery. The North Carolina Infant-Toddler Program (ITP) must ensure that evaluation and assessment activities are completed and, where the child is found eligible, a meeting to develop the initial Individualized Family Service Plan must be conducted within forty-five (45) calendar days after a child is referred to the Infant-Toddler Program, unless the parent indicates otherwise. The CDSA must carefully document any reasons for delays in the early intervention record. There is a flow chart of the process for "Entry into North Carolina's Infant-Toddler Program" at the end of this procedural document.

The CDSA is responsible for developing procedures for managing referrals, designating a Service Coordinator, determining eligibility, and making arrangements for the initial Infant-Toddler Program evaluation, if needed. Any child who appears to meet the eligibility criteria for the Infant-Toddler Program must be referred. (*For additional information, see the Evaluation, Eligibility Determination and Eligibility Categories Procedures.*)

### **Procedures**

#### **1. Referral Sources**

- A. Referral sources are required to notify the CDSA as soon as possible, but in no case more than seven (7) days of identifying children who may be eligible (i.e., would meet one of the eligibility categories and, therefore, be entitled to the rights and services of the Infant-Toddler Program). Any source or method may be used to make referrals to the Infant-Toddler Program for infants and toddlers who may be eligible. Referral sources are strongly encouraged to inform families that they are making a referral and, whenever possible, obtain written parental authorization to share relevant information beyond 'required child find information' (*see child find requirements below in section B*). Thereby, families are more likely prepared to receive a contact regarding Infant-Toddler Program services. State child find laws require the referral source to make a child who may be eligible for the Infant-Toddler Program known to the CDSA even if the parent does not want the child to be referred.

B. According to federal regulations, referral sources include hospitals, physicians, the parent, childcare programs, public schools, public health facilities, other social service agencies, other health care providers, and any other public or private agency receiving public funds. Written authorization by the parent is not required before the referral source notifies the CDSA of the child. North Carolina child find requirements allow the person or agency making the referral to share the child's name, date of birth, address, telephone number, parent's name, and the general fact that the child may be eligible for the Infant-Toddler Program. This information is needed to determine if the child is already receiving services from any local agencies and to make contact with the family. The information shared should only be basic facts that would aid in an initial conversation with the family. Details of specific diagnostic information about the child, family situations, sensitive issues, and information not relevant to the referral cannot be discussed without the parent's written authorization. Beyond the initial referral, the parent gives written parental consent to proceed with the process of determining the child's eligibility for the Infant-Toddler Program. The Children's Developmental Services Agency should notify referral sources about the status of their referrals to the Infant-Toddler Program using the *NC ITP Referral Update Form*. Some options require written parental consent as specified on the form. *(For additional information, see Policy on Procedural Safeguards and the Confidentiality and Prior Written Notice Procedures.)*

## **2. Vision or Hearing Disability**

If there is a diagnosed or suspected vision or hearing disability the CDSA must discuss the referral with the primary care provider, and/or Early Learning Sensory Support program, as appropriate. This discussion must include a review of any existing evaluations and the planning of additional evaluations/assessments.

## **3. If a child has been re-referred and previously had a paper child record**

A copy of the following documents from the child's paper chart must be sent to the receiving CDSA: eligibility determination form, most recent IFSP, discipline specific evaluations related to current developmental concerns and applicable medical records that specify established condition. If applicable, the initial Child Outcome Summary should be sent from the paper chart.

## **4. Service Coordinator Assignment**

Within two (2) working days of receiving a referral, the CDSA will assign an initial Coordinator (EISC) in BEES and initiate contact with the family.

**Initial encounters with families by Service Coordinators include (but are not limited to):**

- listening to the parent's concerns and preferences;
- gathering relevant demographic information;
- completing relevant screens in BEES;
- explaining the Infant-Toddler Program;
- providing parent with a copy of the *NC ITP Parent Handbook* and explaining pertinent rights and safeguards;
- reviewing the *NC ITP Notice of Child and Family Rights* with the parent(s);

- discussing the initial multidisciplinary evaluation and obtaining the parent’s signature on the ***NC ITP Prior Written Notice and Consent for Evaluation and Assessment Form*** indicating the parent’s consent to proceed with the initial eligibility determination, and acknowledgement that the parent has received a copy of the ***Parent Handbook*** and that the ***Notice of Child and Family Rights*** has been received and reviewed with the parent(s) which should be obtained as soon as possible;
- obtaining the parent’s written authorization on the ***NC ITP Authorization to Disclose Health Information Form*** to request information that will assist with eligibility determination and intervention planning (e.g., medical reports, previous evaluation reports) and to establish on-going communication with the referral source and the child’s primary physician;
- obtaining the parent’s written authorization on the ***NC ITP Request for Restrictions on Use and Disclosure of Health Information Form***, if the parent wishes to place any such restrictions;
- completing the ***NC ITP Financial Data Collection Form*** used by the Infant-Toddler Program; and
- outlining with the parent the supports needed to proceed through the eligibility process.

## 5. NC ITP Parent Handbook

The ***Parent Handbook*** explains the role and philosophy of the NC Infant-Toddler Program in family-friendly terms. It includes, but is not limited to:

- a description of the referral and eligibility determination process;
  - information about intervention planning and Infant-Toddler Program services and supports;
  - information about transition planning; and
  - a summary of child and family rights and procedural safeguards.
- A. A copy of the ***Parent Handbook*** should be given to and reviewed with parents at the time of referral to the Infant-Toddler Program, prior to the initial multidisciplinary evaluation or assessment. The ***Parent Handbook*** is a tool to help explain key steps in the process throughout a child’s enrollment in the Infant-Toddler Program. For example, some information in the ***Parent Handbook*** may be helpful to review with families during an annual IFSP meeting or during transition planning.
  - B. The ***Parent Handbook*** includes a summary of child and family rights and procedural safeguards information. An official notice of rights and detailed definitions of these rights is available for families in the ***Notice of Child and Family Rights***.
  - C. It is recommended that Service Coordinators help parents to keep a notebook on their child that can help organize important documents such as the ***Parent Handbook***, ***Notice of Child and Family Rights***, health records, evaluation results, medical reports, letters, notices of meetings, the Individualized Family Service Plan, and other essential materials.
  - D. The ***Parent Handbook*** is available in multiple languages including, but not limited to, English, Spanish, Arabic, Arabic-Yemen, Chinese, Dari, French, Haitian Creole, Hmong, Kirundi, Korean, Swahili, Urdu, and Vietnamese. These translations may be downloaded from <https://www.ncdhhs.gov/divisions/child-and-family-well-being/north-carolina-infant-toddler-program-nc-itp/nc-itp-staff/forms-and-publications..>

## 6. Referrals Deemed Inappropriate

The CDSA may occasionally receive a referral that is deemed inappropriate for the North Carolina Infant-Toddler Program prior to conducting an initial Infant-Toddler Program evaluation. The only reason that a referral to the ITP is deemed inappropriate is when the referral is for children over the age of three. For referrals that are received for children over the age of three, information should be shared about other program(s) or community resources and/or providers, including LEA, as appropriate. These referrals should not be entered in BEES

### **Referrals Unrelated To Developmental Concerns**

When referrals are received unrelated to developmental concerns, the referral should be processed, and ITP services discussed with the family. If the family declines to move forward with determining eligibility for the Infant-Toddler Program, the record is closed and documented in Health Information System BEES as “family declines eligibility determination.” The decision to decline eligibility determination should be communicated in writing to the family using the *NC ITP Rights at Referral Letter* and to the referral source using the *Referral Update Form*, if applicable. Written authorization from the parent is required to make referrals to other programs or community providers.

### **Referrals Received with Incomplete Child Find Information**

When referrals are received with incomplete child find information, the CDSA should contact the referral source and request the missing information. These referrals are only entered in BEES when the referral information is complete. The date of referral will be the date that all children find information is obtained.

### **Referrals That Are Not Within the Appropriate CDSA Catchment Area**

The CDSA may occasionally receive referrals that are not within their catchment area. When a referral is initially received by the CDSA and it is determined that the referral is not within the appropriate catchment area, the CDSA should accept the referral and document the receipt of the referral into BEES on the appropriate screens (see BEES User Guide). The CDSA receiving the initial referral should use the search function to add the child in BEES, complete the demographic screen, upload the referral form into BEES, and document in the communication log that the referral was received by a CDSA outside the catchment area and is being transferred to the appropriate CDSA. The CDSA receiving the initial referral should initiate the transfer process in BEES and notify through phone call or email as soon as possible by using the NC ITP Record Transfer List.

The date of receipt would serve as the official date for the child’s referral to the North Carolina Infant-Toddler Program regardless of whether or not the receiving CDSA is the appropriate agency to serve the child for Infant-Toddler Program services. The CDSA in the appropriate catchment area should honor the original referral date to the NCITP when calculating the 45-day timeline.

The CDSA that accepted the referral should inform the referral source that the referral was received and notify them of the appropriate CDSA, and that the referral has been transferred to the CDSA that will be serving the child.

## **Post-Referral Timeline (45-Day Timeline)**

The post-referral timeline, more commonly referred to as the 45-day timeline, begins on the day the CDSA receives a referral on a child who may be eligible for Infant-Toddler Program services. The timeline consists of forty-five calendar days within which an initial evaluation of the child, initial assessments of the child and family, and the initial Individualized Family Service Plan meeting (where applicable) should occur. For example, if a child is referred to a CDSA on June 3rd, an evaluation, assessments, and the Individualized Family Service Plan meeting must be held by July 18th.

## **Families' Right to Proceed at Their Own Pace**

Service Coordinators must ensure that each parent understands their rights related to the processes of completing the initial evaluation of the child for eligibility determination purposes, initial assessments of the child and family for care planning purposes, and completion of the initial Individualized Family Service Plan meeting. Related safeguards are in place, enabling parents to proceed at their own pace.

Parents dictate the pace at which any action occurs according to their family's unique needs and circumstances. The intention of the post-referral timeline is to expedite necessary actions in order to serve the best interests of the child and family.

A parent may alter the pace and timeframe for completion of requirements by requesting (or otherwise initiating) a delay in the process. A parent's request for (or initiation of) delay does not negate the 45-day timeline; instead, the process is extended beyond the 45-day expectation as a result of circumstances impacting the family's desire or ability to move forward. The CDSA will not be held responsible when exceptional family circumstances cause a delay in the post-referral timeline. In some instances, families may specifically request a delay in the process. In other instances, and often due to circumstances beyond their control, a family cannot be located or does not respond to a CDSA's reasonable attempts to contact them. All such instances must be documented and filed in the child's record at the time of the notation.

The expectation of the Infant-Toddler Program to complete the initial evaluation of the child, initial child and family assessments, and the Individualized Family Service Plan meeting within the 45-day timeframe remains unless the parent changes this expectation by verbal or written request or by other exceptional circumstances.

A parent who chooses not to enroll a child in the Infant-Toddler Program should be informed that the law does not protect them should the parent feel that a particular service or entitlement under the Infant-Toddler Program has been denied them. The parent must be fully informed of the consequences of the choice not to enroll and the right to request services at a later date. For example, a child who is not enrolled in the Infant-Toddler Program is not granted the transition assurances for Preschool Program placement entitled to children enrolled in the Infant-Toddler Program, including guaranteed placement, if eligible, on the child's third birthday.

If the parent chooses not to enroll their child in the Infant-Toddler Program or the child ceases to be enrolled at some point, the CDSA should discuss the need for other services or supports with the parent. The CDSA should share information with the parent about other community resources, as appropriate.

## Special Considerations

### A. When the Parent is Not Engaged in the Referral and Eligibility Determination Process

When a parent is not engaged in the Infant-Toddler Program referral and eligibility determination process, the Service Coordinator must make numerous and varied attempts to contact the parent (e.g., phone calls, home visits, mail, requesting assistance from the referral source, the child's physician, relatives, or other community resources). The **Referral Update Form** should be used to solicit the referring program's help in contacting the family. If unsuccessful in contacting the parent or resolving issues related to the parent's lack of participation, the Service Coordinator must send the parent a letter by mail that:

- i. reviews what the Infant-Toddler Program is and how it may be beneficial to the child and family;
- ii. states who referred the child and why;
- iii. includes a copy of the **Notice of Child and Family Rights** under the Infant-Toddler Program;
- iv. states that attempt to involve the parent have been unsuccessful and briefly describes these attempts;
- v. requests that the parent contact the Service Coordinator within ten (10) calendar days, if the parent wishes to discuss continued involvement and the receipt of services; and
- vi. informs the parent that he may contact the CDSA at any time in the future about resuming participation in the Infant-Toddler Program.

If the parent does not respond to this letter, the Service Coordinator must document the lack of response in the child's record and stop the referral and eligibility determination process. The Service Coordinator must inform the family of their rights regarding confidentiality and the referral using the **Rights at Referral Letter**. If the parent does respond, but states that he does not want to proceed with the referral and eligibility determination process at the present time, the Service Coordinator must document the parent's decision in the child's record and send the family the **Rights at Referral Letter**. All written communication to the parent must be uploaded into the appropriate file in BEES. All attempts to reach the family should be documented in the communication log, or if applicable The **Referral Update Form** should be used to notify the referring program of any decisions made regarding eligibility.

### B. Initiation of Urgent Interventions

Under certain circumstances, Infant-Toddler Program services may commence for an eligible child and family before the completion of the initial Infant-Toddler Program evaluation and the development of the initial Individualized Family Service Plan. The parent, the Service Coordinator, and the service providers who have initiated such services must develop an Interim Individualized Family Service Plan. (*For additional information, see Individualized Family Service Plan Procedures.*)

**a. Children with Extended Hospital Stays**

A child under age 3 who is hospitalized has the same Infant-Toddler Program rights to referral, eligibility determination, Individualized Family Service Plan development, and service delivery as a child living with his or her family in the community. The CDSA must work with hospitals to ensure mechanisms are in place for making referrals, sharing information with families, maintaining effective and efficient communication, conducting evaluations, planning, and delivering appropriate services to the child and family, and ensuring appropriate implementation of Infant-Toddler Program requirements. While all Infant-Toddler Program assurances must be met for these children and their families, services cannot be billed to third party payers or public/private insurance by non-hospital providers while the child is an inpatient in the hospital.

If extended hospitalization occurs at the time of the birth of the child, upon establishing reasonable expectation that the child will survive, hospitals are required to make a referral to the appropriate CDSA within seven (7) working days of identifying a child who may be eligible. The CDSA in the child’s county of residence is responsible for ensuring that all aspects of the Infant-Toddler Program are implemented. If personnel are available in the hospital to help facilitate the referral and eligibility processes, the assigned Service Coordinator may enlist their help with the activities that are a part of initial encounters with the parent. The CDSA must work with hospitals to ensure that the parent is provided with information about the Infant-Toddler Program, including the child’s and family’s rights, so that the parent can make an informed decision regarding the pursuit of eligibility determination.

**b. When a Family Moves within the CDSA Catchment Area**

If a family moves during the referral and eligibility determination process, the CDSA must ensure that this process continues without interruption and proceeds as smoothly as possible for the child and family. The 45-day timeline requirement remains. If it is necessary to change the designation of the Service Coordinator, this must be done with sensitivity to the family’s needs and with the least amount of disruption possible.

**c. When a Family Moves from One CDSA Catchment Area to Another During the Referral Process**

If a family moves into a different CDSA catchment area during the referral and eligibility determination process, both Children’s Developmental Services Agencies must ensure that this process continues as smoothly as possible for the child and family. Staff at the **sending CDSA** should inform the **receiving CDSA** that the family will be transferring as soon as possible once informed by the family. A new Service Coordinator must be designated at the **receiving CDSA** and must contact the parent immediately to develop and implement plans for proceeding with eligibility determination. All efforts to coordinate between the sending and receiving CDSA EISCs and evaluation teams should be made, with continuous shared and transparent information with the family. The initial 45-day timeline for referral does not change because a family moved and should be honored to the greatest extent possible. The CDSAs must coordinate and articulate a plan to ensure each CDSA knows its responsibility toward completing eligibility and, if appropriate, developing the IFSP.

The following steps are required:

- The sending CDSA assure all information in BEES is up to date (including service logs).
  - The sending CDSA will write an exit note in communication log in BEES
  - A district administration or state administrator at the sending CDSA will go to the transfer screen in BEES select district to transfer to from the drop down and select “transfer now.”
- d. At the Receiving CDSA** a district administrator or state administration will go to transfer pending consents on their district administrator dashboard, select the child from the drop down to transfer them to their CDSA. Once they select the child it will open the demographic screen and they will need to assign a service coordinator. When a Child Moves from Another State

If a child moves into North Carolina from another state where he was eligible for Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, it is necessary to go through the North Carolina Infant-Toddler Program referral and eligibility determination process, as described in this procedural document because states have different eligibility criteria or definitions. If the evaluation and assessment information from the other state is less than six months old, is complete, and available for use, the requirements to complete an initial Infant-Toddler Program evaluation may not be necessary. *(For additional information, see Evaluation, Eligibility Determination and Eligibility Categories Procedures.)*

**e. When Children are Referred to the Infant-Toddler Program Close to Their Third Birthday Children referred 45 – 90 days prior to third birthday**

Children referred to the Infant-Toddler Program close to their third birthday (typically 45 to 90 days prior to the child’s third birthday) are entitled to Infant-Toddler Program enrollment, including Individualized Family Service Plan development and service delivery. These referrals will be accepted and entered into BEES. When referral does occur close to the third birthday, it is recommended that the Infant-Toddler Program fully explain to the parent the following: the eligibility determination process, available services, and child and family rights, including rights to transition and service availability on the third birthday and similar information regarding LEA/Part B.

If the parent decides not to pursue eligibility determination for the Infant-Toddler Program but does wish to pursue Preschool Program services, the established Preschool Program referral procedures, including planning for necessary evaluations, should be initiated instead of those for the Infant-Toddler Program. (If the parent decides not to pursue eligibility for the Infant-Toddler Program and the Preschool Program, the parent must be informed of the CDSA’s requirement for Child Find reporting to the Local Education Agency. In BEES, complete the demographic screen, parent screen, and LEA notification date on the Transition/Exit screen once information has been sent to the LEA/PSU, and document in the communication log the conversation with the family.) If the parent wishes to be considered for participation in the Infant-Toddler Program, the existing Infant-Toddler Program eligibility determination procedures are to be followed. Evaluation planning should consider the Preschool Program entry requirements to avoid subsequent duplicative evaluations. Because of the child's age, transition will be a major intervention focus on the Individualized Family Service Plan. *(For additional information, see Policy on Transition from the*

*Infant-Toddler Program, Transition Procedures, Addendum to Procedure for Transition from the Infant-Toddler Program, and the current Guiding Practices for Early Childhood Transitions in NC.)*

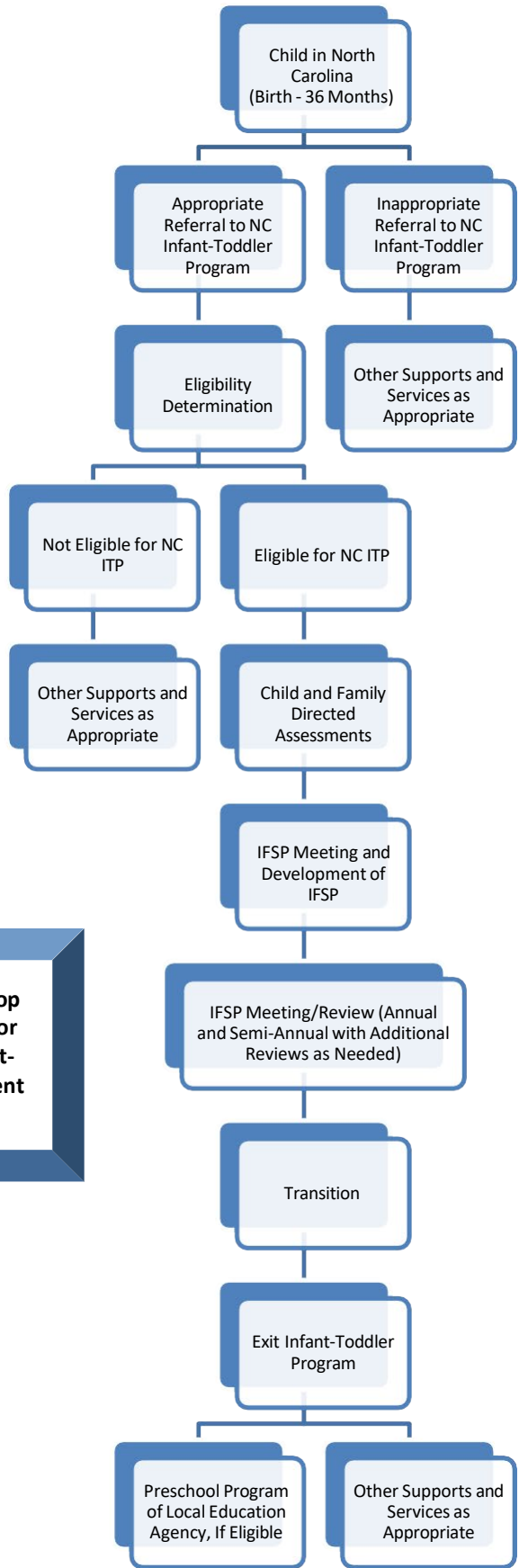
The CDSA should discuss the need for services and supports after age three with the parent and make a referral(s) to other supports and services, as appropriate. Written authorization from the parent to make appropriate referral(s) is required.

**Children referred less than 45 days before third birthday**

If a child is referred to the lead agency fewer than 45 days before that toddler’s third birthday, the lead agency is not required to conduct the initial evaluation, assessment, or IFSP meeting.

However, the CDSA is required to participate in a variety of activities for purposes of child find to identify children potentially eligible for receiving Part C services. This requirement includes entering and documenting all referrals received (including children referred less than 45 days from their 3rd birthday) into BEES. Entering referrals for children referred less than 45 days from their 3rd birthday in BEES does not obligate the CDSA to determine the child’s eligibility for the Infant-Toddler Program. If the child may be eligible for preschool services or other services under Part B, the CDSA, with parental consent, is required to refer the toddler to the SEA and appropriate LEA.

In BEES, complete the demographic screen, parent screen, and with written parental consent the LEA notification date on the Transition/Exit screen once information has been sent to the LEA/PSU, upload the consent for LEA/PSU if application, and document in the communication log the conversations/activities completed.)



**Parents may choose to stop eligibility determination or withdraw from the Infant-Toddler Program enrollment at any time.**