



# Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) for Georgia Families

Babies Can't Wait Program



## Babies Can't Wait Program

### What is Babies Can't Wait (BCW)?

Launched in 1989, the Babies Can't Wait program is a statewide system that offers access to early intervention services to children age birth to three who may be at risk for developmental delay or disabilities and their families. BCW is the beginning of special education in Georgia under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) funded by state and federal funds. It is run by the Georgia Department of Human Resources, Division of Public Health, and delivers services through 18 district offices across the state of Georgia.

### Why does Georgia need BCW?

Each year in Georgia, more than 10,000 babies are born with or develop conditions that affect typical growth and learning. A child's early years, from birth to age three, are a critical time to prepare for later learning—half of a child's physical, social, emotional, and intellectual growth takes place in these first few years. This is why it's important to create a solid foundation. Since 1989, Babies Can't Wait has served thousands of Georgia children and families. In fact, in 2006, more than 11,000 children and families were served.

### What does BCW do in Georgia?

BCW assists and supports Georgia families in need of developmental services by: 1) promoting and coordinating early detection of developmental delays, 2) educating families and providers about the benefits of early intervention and developmental signs or milestones, 3) providing access to important family support services, 4) enabling health and child care providers to provide referrals to the program, 5) and offering early intervention resources such as speech-language pathology, audiologic services and occupational therapy, to name a few.

### What is child development?

Child development refers to how a child learns to do more complex things as they get older. Throughout the first few years of your child's life, doctors will help you track your child's height and weight. But, there are other parts of your child's development that are just as important such as smiling, talking, crawling, walking and playing. Knowing and understanding how your child is developing on the inside is just as important as how they are developing on the outside.

Examples of child development skills are:

- *Gross motor*: using large groups of muscles to sit, stand, walk, run, balance, and changing positions
- *Fine motor*: using hands to eat, draw, dress, play and write
- *Language*: speaking, using body language and gestures, communicating, and understanding what others say
- *Cognitive (thinking skills)*: learning, understanding, problem-solving, reasoning, and remembering
- *Social*: interacting with others, having relationships with family, friends, and teachers, cooperating, and responding to the feelings of others

### Why is it important to understand how your child is developing and if they are reaching certain milestones?

It has been shown that from birth to three years of age important physical, social and emotional growth takes place to build a strong foundation for learning and life. Every child develops at different speeds. However, understanding which important skills your child should be able to



master around a time period or age in your child's life is important. These are considered milestones. These milestones help guide parents during the early years of speedy development.

Early support and help for children that might not be reaching milestones by certain ages can make a significant difference in children reaching their potential. To see how your child is doing, BCW has designed a free chart you can refer to as your child grows. Visit [www.georgiafamiliesmatter.org](http://www.georgiafamiliesmatter.org) to download or call 1-800-229-2038 to order the chart. Speaking with your pediatrician about any concerns you might have during this time is also important so he or she can recommend early intervention services, if needed.

### **What are early intervention services?**

If a child does fall behind on certain milestones, a pediatrician will often refer the family to early intervention services. These are services that assist a child and family in maximizing the child's potential. These might include audiology, family training and counseling, physical therapy, speech-language pathology and transportation to services. BCW provides these services on a sliding fee scale.

### **What types of services does BCW offer?**

BCW provides the following full-range of services:

- assistive technology devices and services
- audiologic services
- family training and counseling
- health services
- medical diagnostic services
- nursing services
- nutrition services
- occupational therapy
- physical therapy
- psychological services
- social work
- special instruction
- speech-language pathology
- vision services
- transportation

## **Program Changes to Georgia's Babies Can't Wait Program**

### **Why has BCW recently made changes?**

Recently, BCW made changes to its system to better serve Georgia's families. Many changes have occurred in the last few years that have impacted the effectiveness of BCW including a 60 percent enrollment increase. In response, the program has gone through a redesign to make it more effective and more responsive to Georgia's children's needs. Now, each child and family has a service coordinator and a dedicated team of providers that work closely together. This allows the family to be better connected and part of their child's services. The improvements to the system have allowed BCW to better serve families across Georgia and support successful outcomes for as many children as possible.

### **What are the changes to BCW?**

The main change is the way in which services will be coordinated by BCW with you. The new approach is more family-centered and offers more individualized care and support. It is called the



Primary Service Provider model (PSP). Research has shown that this new model leads to gains in child development and improves outcomes for children and is the preferred model of the federal Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) programs. Seven other states have already tested it and found it successful. What this means for you is:

- Each family has a dedicated service coordinator who oversees the child and family's individualized services.
- In addition, led by the service coordinator, a network of healthcare providers work together to meet the developmental needs of each child. These providers may include occupational therapists, physical therapists, counselors or speech-language pathologists.
- Services help children's developmental needs, as well as offer support directly to the families.

### **What do these changes mean to me and my family?**

Through the PSP model, you will have one person to coordinate with on all your child's needs and services. Evaluation and assessment activities may be conducted jointly, saving you time and office visits to different providers. Communication among all your child's providers will be enhanced through regular team meetings and opportunities for co-visits. Varied settings or natural environments will continue to be offered for your flexibility. This means providers may coordinate appointments with you at your home, child care center, neighborhood park, shopping center or other environments your child is used to and comfortable in.

## **Accessing Babies Can't Wait Services in Georgia**

### **Who is eligible for services?**

A child under the age of 36 months who is a Georgia resident that:

1. Has a [diagnosed medical condition](#) such as down syndrome, spina bifida, [autism](#), blindness, [deafness](#), or other medical conditions that will result in a developmental delay or
2. Shows significant delays in development such as talking or walking

### **Who can refer a child?**

Anyone who has a concern about a child's development can refer a child. This includes parents, guardians, family members, pediatricians, social workers, nurses and child care providers. If someone other than the child's parents makes the referral, the parents will be contacted by BCW for their permission before any action is taken. Participation is voluntary. To make a referral or for more information about referrals, contact BCW at 1-800-229-2038.

### **How do you refer a child?**

If you have concerns about a child's ability to see, talk, hear, move, eat or play, contact BCW at 1-800-229-2038. You will be asked for basic information, such as the name, address and telephone number of the family, along with the reason for referral. The operators will then forward this information to the BCW coordinator nearest to your home.

### **Who will contact the child's family?**

BCW staff will contact the family to discuss their child's development and needs and gain permission to provide services.

### **How is a child's eligibility determined?**

Using standardized evaluation tools, BCW staff will evaluate your child's growth and development. BCW staff will include parents or guardians and care providers to be involved in the evaluation, if requested.



### **How do services start?**

Once parental permission is gained, BCW staff will visit your child to conduct a comprehensive developmental evaluation free of charge. Based on the results, BCW will connect you to appropriate providers to develop a full care plan.

### **What is my involvement in the plan?**

As parents or guardians you are the most important person in your child's life. You typically spend time guiding your child through important early developmental years making your observations and concerns extremely important. Once BCW begins services, your involvement will be one of support and stability for your child. Additionally, ensuring your child is available and able to attend appointments will be important, too.

### **Who provides the services?**

BCW only works with licensed, certified and/or approved providers. They provide direct services to your child based on certain qualifications.

### **What is the cost for BCW services provided?**

BCW provides evaluation at no cost to families to determine a child's eligibility for the program and the scope of services needed. Once a treatment plan is in place, services are provided on a sliding fee scale, meaning the costs can vary depending on income, insurance coverage, program aid, etc. A BCW coordinator will work with you to determine what that means for you and if insurance and/or Medicaid or BCW funds can be of assistance.