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## Principles: Early Start Program for Infants and Toddlers

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### **BACKGROUND:**

Disability Rights California is committed to ensuring effective, appropriate early intervention programs and services are available for infants and toddlers with disabilities. Children with developmental delays or who are at risk for developmental delays that receive early intervention services have better outcomes, and require less costly services in the future.

California participates in the federally funded Early Start Program for infants and toddlers ages 0 to 3. The program is implemented in California pursuant to the California Early Intervention Services Act through the State Department of Developmental Services (DDS). DDS provides the program through a system of 21 regional centers and the State Department of Education.

Prior to 2009, the state Early Start Program provided services to infants and toddlers under the age of 3 who were “developmentally delayed,” had an “established risk,” or who were “at high risk” of a developmental delay. California also had a richer array of services than required by federal law and allowed for the purchase of child care, dentistry and respite. In 2009, because of the state’s fiscal crisis, infants and toddlers with “high risk conditions” were no longer eligible. In 2014, California restored the broader

definition of eligibility to pre-2009 criteria but did not restore the broader array of services.<sup>1</sup>

## **PRINCIPLES:**

To ensure effective services for children and toddlers with disabilities, state law should:

1. Maintain expanded state criteria for the Early Start Program and thereby maximize eligibility for infants and toddlers.
2. Provide a full array of services to meet the needs of all infants and toddlers and their family including ensuring that all Early Start participants have access to services such as child care, dentistry, and respite.
3. Maintain and increase resources for family to family support. This includes programs that provide prevention resources, referral services and outreach information for families of infants and toddlers who are “at risk” for developmental delays.
4. Provide early intervention services in the least restrictive setting, which may be the family home, or outside the home in regular children care programs, or preschool programs. This includes transportation assistance so the family may access services outside the home.
5. Provide a seamless transition from early intervention to special education services at age 3 and from Early Start to services under the Lanterman Act for those children who are eligible for those services.
6. Provide culturally and linguistically appropriate assessments, program plan meetings, and services and training for families including, ensuring that documents are translated in the family’s preferred language and alternative communication services are provided consistent with state law requirements so that ethnically diverse communities are provided with appropriate language access.
7. Provide necessary and appropriate accommodations, including ensuring that assessments, program plan meeting materials, training materials

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<sup>1</sup> See:

<http://www.dds.ca.gov/Director/docs/2009BudgetReductionsSummary.pdf>

and any other documents are provided in alternative formats when requested.