

2021 Baby Watch Cost and Rate Study Summary

This document provides a summary of the history, outcome, and recommendations from the 2021 Baby Watch Early Intervention Program (BWEIP) Cost and Rate Study, completed by Public Consulting Group (PCG).

In 2015, a cost study was conducted with BWEIP to study of the total costs of providing early intervention (EI) services through BWEIP for the time period of July 1, 2013 to June 30, 2014. The intention of this cost study was to provide BWEIP state and local staff with new information about variations in service delivery, staff wages, benefits and cost that could be used to inform best practices for the program. This study was designed to answer questions about services and the cost of those services that could not be answered by extant funding, revenue and Baby Toddler Online Tracking System (BTOTS) data alone. Since that time, BWEIP has continued to be challenged with ongoing funding needs to support quality early intervention services for growing numbers of eligible children in the State of Utah. A legislative audit of BWEIP, conducted in 2017, recommended that the Division of Family Health and Preparedness develop and implement a plan to improve funding for Baby Watch Early Intervention. In 2019, the Office of Special Education Program's National Technical Assistance partners made the recommendation for BWEIP to conduct a new cost study to provide information to answer questions about the current cost of early intervention services. The intended outcome of the cost study was to provide reliable information to determine the average cost per child for BWEIP services (i.e., wages, service, administration, building, travel costs).

The cost and rate study project commenced in March 2020 and was scheduled for completion in September 2020. Challenges from the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in delays for the majority of the deliverables on this project. However, the pandemic also provided the opportunity for PCG to do a pilot analysis of the cost for providing tele-intervention services. During the project, PCG collected cost reports and personnel rosters from local early intervention programs across the State of Utah for SFYs 2019 and 2020. Time studies were also conducted with early intervention staff across the state.

Upon completion of the BWEIP Cost and Rate study, PCG made four recommendations for the Department to consider moving forward. Each of these recommendations need to be further evaluated to determine if they will result in positive outcomes for Utah's Part C Early Intervention System.

1. Transition to a standard fee-for-service methodology between BWEIP, Medicaid, CHIP, and private health insurance that would be based on 15-minute time increments for early intervention services, with modifiers for tele-intervention and local early intervention program rate groups (urban, rural, frontier).
2. Bill private insurance for early intervention services by submitting claims through a traditional claiming process and coding claims as routine clinical services with adding specific early intervention modifiers. PCG suggested that the Utah Department of Health work with state legislature to pass a mandate, requiring insurance companies to accept, process, and pay for early intervention claims. The Department is currently pursuing a feasibility study to evaluate any benefit for the State of Utah to bill private insurance for early intervention services.
3. Improve Utah's Medicaid system by transitioning from the current bundled rate to fee-for-service rate, also with a 15-minute time increments for early intervention services. In addition, it was recommended to establish a separate monthly rate for service coordination.
4. Rate recommendations were made for in-person early intervention services in each geographic rate group (urban, rural, frontier), tele-intervention services, and service coordination. Projected reimbursements were provided based on Utah's legislative recommendation of 1.7 early intervention service visits/month per child, as well as the national average of 4.7 hours/month of early intervention services per child. Per the final results of the Baby Watch Cost and Rate Study, with the exception of being limited to 1.7 early intervention service visits/month per child, Utah early intervention programs are currently being reimbursed a fair market rate based on the national averages obtained by PCG.