

Children with Special Needs

DEFINITION

Children with special needs are those who have a chronic disease or disability that requires educational services, health care and/or related services of a type or amount beyond that required generally by children. Special needs can be physical, developmental, behavioral and/or emotional. This indicator measures the number of children enrolled in Early Intervention, special education, and Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and Medical Assistance (where the child is eligible due to special health care needs) in 2007.

SIGNIFICANCE

One in five children (20%) nationwide have a chronic physical, developmental, behavioral or emotional condition that requires health care or related services.¹ Some chronic and disabling conditions among children include mental retardation, attention deficit disorder, asthma, autism, hearing impairment, communication disorders, seizure disorders and congenital diseases.^{2,3}

Children with special needs are a heterogeneous group, varying by the type and severity of the chronic disease or disability. Children's needs vary based on the age of the child, as well as by the many differences in the population at large - such as family income, race,

ethnicity, primary language and parental education levels.⁴ Children with chronic or disabling conditions are likely to have limitations or impairments in physical, social, emotional or behavioral functioning.⁵ In Rhode Island, youth with special needs are much less likely than their non-disabled peers to finish high school, go on to postsecondary education, find employment, earn an adequate wage and live independently.⁶

There are some issues of common concern to families of children with chronic or disabling conditions. Whether disabilities are mild or severe, they have the potential to create special needs related to physical health, mental health, education, family support, child care, recreation and career preparation. For many parents, having a child with special needs has a significant impact on their finances, their jobs and their family life.^{7,8}

Children with special needs require access to services that are appropriate to their individualized health, education and social-emotional needs in order to reach their full potential and minimize the likelihood of life-long dependence.^{9,10} Some children with disabilities may require costly therapeutic and health care services, equipment, assistive technology or home modifications which may result in serious financial burdens on families.¹¹



Children Enrolled in Early Intervention

- ◆ States are required by the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Part C to provide appropriate Early Intervention services to all children under age 3 who are developmentally delayed or have been diagnosed with a physical or mental condition that has a high probability of resulting in a developmental delay.¹²
- ◆ In Rhode Island in 2007, the ten certified Early Intervention providers served 3,338 children under age 3. Nearly two-thirds (63%) of children receiving Early Intervention services were male and just over one-third (37%) were female.¹³
- ◆ In 2007, 70% of children in Early Intervention programs had significant developmental delays (i.e. physical, cognitive, behavioral and/or emotional delays of unknown medical origin), 20% had a single established condition affecting development, such as cerebral palsy and 8% had multiple established conditions. Information was not available for 2% of children receiving Early Intervention services.¹⁴



Children Enrolled in Special Education

- ◆ Under IDEA Part B, local school systems are responsible for identifying and evaluating students ages 3 to 21 whom they have reason to believe are students with disabilities and therefore might require special education and related services.¹⁵
- ◆ In Rhode Island during the 2006-2007 school year, 19% (27,345) of children enrolled in public school received special education services. Forty-three percent (43%) of the students receiving special education services in Rhode Island had a learning disability.¹⁶
- ◆ Early Intervention programs are required to provide transition services for children who may be eligible for special education at age three. In 2007, 611 (71%) of the 860 children who reached age 3 while in Early Intervention were referred to Special Education.¹⁷ During the 2006-2007 school year, there were 2,985 children ages 3 to 5 who were not yet in kindergarten receiving special education services.¹⁸



Medical Assistance Coverage for Children with Special Health Care Needs

- ◆ Children and youth who meet certain disability criteria are eligible for Medicaid and/or cash assistance through the federal Supplemental Security Income (SSI) program.¹⁹ As of December 31, 2007, there were 5,605 Rhode Island children and youth under age 21 receiving Medical Assistance benefits because of their enrollment in SSI.²⁰
- ◆ In Rhode Island, the Katie Beckett eligibility provision provides Medical Assistance coverage to certain children and youth who have serious disabling conditions, in order to enable them to be cared for at home instead of in an institution. As of December 31, 2007, there were 1,770 Rhode Island children and youth under age 21 enrolled in Medical Assistance because of eligibility through the Katie Beckett provision.²¹
- ◆ In 2005-2006, an estimated 17% of Rhode Island children under age 18 had special health care needs.²² School-age children are more likely to have special health care needs than younger children; 10% of children under age 5, 20% of children ages 6 to 11 years and 21% of children ages 12 to 17 years have special health care needs in Rhode Island.²³ Children with special needs can have multiple disabilities; a recent Rhode Island study found that 34% of children with special needs had one disability, 34% had two disabilities and 33% had three or more disabilities.²⁴
- ◆ Twenty percent of children in poor families (with incomes less than 100% of the federal poverty level) in Rhode Island have special health care needs, compared with 14% in this income category in the U.S. as a whole. Having children with special needs can limit employment for family members. In Rhode Island, there were an estimated 9,600 children with special health care needs that limited the employment of a family member.²⁵

References

¹ *Child Trends databank – Children with limitations.* (n.d.). Retrieved February 1, 2007 from www.childtrendsdatabank.org

^{2,5} Msall, M. E., Avery, R. C., Tremont, M. R., Lima, J. C., Rogers, M. L. & Hogan, D. P. (2003). Functional disability and school activity limitations in 41,300 school-age children: Relationship to medical impairments. *Pediatrics*, 111(3), 548-553.

^{3,9,11} Wells, N., Krauss, M. W., Anderson, B., Gulley, S., Leiter, V., O'Neil, M., Martin, L. & Cooper, J. (2000). *What do families say about health care for children with special health care needs? Your voice counts!* Boston, MA: Family Voices at the Federation for Children with Special Health Care Needs.

^{4,8} Szilagyi, P. (2003). Care of children with special health care needs. *The Future of Children*, 13(1), 137-151.



Children with Special Needs in the Child Welfare System

United States

- ◆ Nationally, almost half (47%) of children ages 6 to 11 who are in foster care and 40% of those ages 12 to 14 have a clinical level of behavioral and emotional problems. The rate of emotional and behavioral problems among children between the ages of 6 to 14 who live in foster care is approximately four times that of other children.²⁶
- ◆ More than half of young children living in foster care experience developmental delays, which is 4 to 5 times the rate of developmental delay found among children in the general population. Over half of children in foster care experience serious physical problems.²⁷
- ◆ Twenty-four percent of U.S. children under age 15 who live in foster care have chronic health problems, including 30% of those under age six. Nearly one-third (30%) of children in foster care under the age of 15 have a disability.²⁸

Rhode Island

- ◆ Children who are adopted through the Department of Children, Youth and Families and have special needs may qualify for adoption subsidies, including Medical Assistance. As of December 31, 2007, 2,616 children were receiving Medical Assistance because of special needs adoptions. In addition, 2,681 children in foster care were enrolled in Medical Assistance due to their foster care status.²⁹
- ◆ As of 2007, Rhode Island youth in the foster care system on their 18th birthday are provided with RIte Care health insurance coverage through the Post Foster Care Medical Assistance provision until their 21st birthday.³⁰

⁶ *Children with disabilities study: Special education in the context of school reform.* (2002). Commissioned by the Rhode Island General Assembly in July 1999.

^{7,22,23,25} 2005/2006 *National Survey of Children with Special Health Care Needs. Rhode Island Chartbook Page.* (n.d.). Retrieved February 8, 2007 from www.cshcndata.org

¹⁰ *The well being of our nation: An inter-generational vision of effective mental health services and supports.* (2002). Washington, DC: National Council on Disability.

¹² Shackelford, J. (2002). State and jurisdictional eligibility definitions for infants and toddlers with disabilities under IDEA. *NECTAC Notes, Issue No. 11.* Chapel Hill, NC: National Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center.

^{13,14,17} Rhode Island Department of Human Services, Center for Child and Family Health, 2007.

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