

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 those required generally by children. Special needs can be physical, developmental, behavioral, and/or emotional. This indicator measures the number of children with special health care needs enrolled in Early Intervention, special education, Supplemental Security Income (SSI), and Medical Assistance.

SIGNIFICANCE

An estimated 19% of children in the U.S. and 21% of children in Rhode Island had at least one special health care need.¹ Children with special health care needs (CSHCN) can have impairments in physical, developmental, emotional, and/or behavioral functioning.² In 2019, 45% of parents with young children in Rhode Island and 38% of parents nationally reported completing a developmental screening.³ In Rhode Island, 66% of CSHCN have two or more health conditions, compared to 70% of CSHCN in the U.S. Commonly reported health conditions among CSHCN include allergies, ADHD, behavioral challenges, asthma, learning disabilities, anxiety, developmental delays, and other mental health conditions.⁴ In Rhode Island in 2017, high school students with disabilities reported being

bullied at school and cyber bullied more than their peers and were twice as likely to feel sad or hopeless and more than three times as likely to have made a suicide plan as their peers.⁵

Raising a child with special health care needs is often challenging, however, many parents report caring for a CSHCN can increase patience, compassion, personal strength, and deepen relationships with family and professionals. CSHCN can be a positive influence on other children and adults.⁶

CSHCN may require physical health, mental health, and education services, special equipment, or assistive technology. Health-related needs are best met with a comprehensive, coordinated, and family-centered medical home. Families may also need help with transportation, child care, family support, and home modifications. Having children with special needs can significantly impact parents' finances, employment, and family lives.^{7,8,9}

In 2014, Congress passed the *Achieving a Better Life Experience Act (ABLE)*, which created tax-exempt saving accounts for people who become disabled before age 26. *ABLE* accounts cover a range of expenses related to living a life with disabilities, including health care, education, housing, transportation, and employment training.^{10,11} In 2015, the Rhode Island General Assembly established *ABLE* savings accounts for Rhode Islanders with special health care needs.¹²



Children Enrolled in Early Intervention

- ◆ States are required by the federal *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Part C* to identify and provide appropriate Early Intervention (EI) services to all infants and toddlers under age three who have developmental delays or have a diagnosed physical or mental condition that is associated with a developmental delay.¹³
- ◆ As of June 30, 2020, nine certified EI provider agencies served 2,224 children in Rhode Island. Sixty percent of those children receiving EI services were male and 40% were female. Of these children, 56% were white, 31% were Hispanic, 7% were Black, 4% were Mixed Race, 2% were Asian, and <1% were American Indian or Alaska Native.¹⁴



Children Enrolled in Special Education

- ◆ Under *IDEA Part B*, local school systems are responsible for identifying, evaluating, and serving students ages three to 21 who have disabilities that might require special education and related services.¹⁵
- ◆ As of June 30, 2020, in Rhode Island, there were 2,904 children ages three to five who received preschool special education services.¹⁶
- ◆ In Rhode Island as of June 30, 2020, 21,660 students in public schools ages six to 21 received special education services (15% of all students). Thirty-five percent of students receiving special education services in Rhode Island had a learning disability.¹⁷
- ◆ Early Intervention (EI) programs are required to provide transition services for children who are enrolled in EI and who may be eligible for special education services at age three. In 2020, 58% of the 1,062 children who reached age three while in EI were determined to be eligible for preschool special education, 16% were found not eligible, 17% were in the process of eligibility determination, 6% had successfully met all developmental goals, and 3% left the program for other reasons.¹⁸

Children with Special Needs



Medical Assistance for Children With Special Health Care Needs

- ◆ As of December 31, 2020, there were 4,457 Rhode Island children and youth under age 19 receiving Medical Assistance benefits through their enrollment in the federal SSI program.^{19,20}
- ◆ In Rhode Island, the Katie Beckett eligibility provision provides Medical Assistance coverage to children under age 19 who have serious disabling conditions, in order to enable them to be cared for at home instead of in an institution.²¹ As of December 31, 2020, there were 827 Rhode Island children enrolled through the Katie Beckett provision, a decline of 53% from the peak enrollment of 1,770 in 2007.^{22,23}
- ◆ Children with special health care needs have a variety of coverage options under Medicaid. Medicaid coverage also provides access to the Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnostic, and Treatment benefit, which requires that children receive all the services they need, either as a direct benefit or wrap-around benefit to commercial coverage they might have.^{24,25}



Children With Special Needs in the Child Welfare System

- ◆ Children and youth who are in the child welfare system are more likely to have special needs, including behavioral and emotional problems, developmental delays, and serious health problems than other children. They often enter the child welfare system in poor health and face difficulties accessing services while in care.^{26,27}
- ◆ As of December 31, 2020, 2,338 children in Rhode Island were enrolled in Medical Assistance through the child welfare system.²⁸ Per provisions of the federal *Affordable Care Act*, all youth who turned age 18 while in foster care are eligible for Medicaid coverage until they reach age 26 in the state in which they aged out of care.²⁹ In Rhode Island, estimates show that 84% of all eligible former foster youth were enrolled in Medicaid coverage as of December 31, 2020, down from 99% in 2019.³⁰
- ◆ Children who are adopted through the Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth and Families and have special needs may qualify for Medical Assistance coverage.³¹ As of December 31, 2020, 2,889 children were enrolled in Medical Assistance because of special needs adoptions.³²

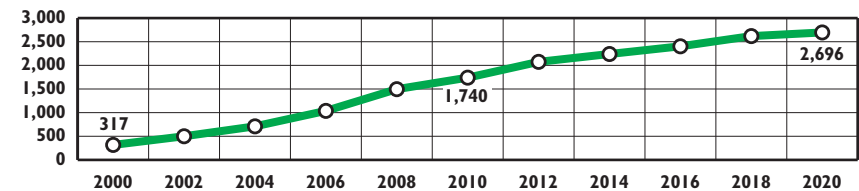


Children With Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

- ◆ Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a developmental disability that can cause significant social, communication, and behavioral challenges. Children diagnosed with ASD have a variety of symptoms and experience challenges and abilities that range widely in severity. Many children with ASD face challenges in social interaction, speech/language, and communication and demonstrate repetitive behaviors and routines.³³
- ◆ The national ASD prevalence among children age eight is estimated to be 18.5 per 1,000 children. ASD prevalence is significantly higher among boys (29.7 per 1,000 boys) than girls (6.9 per 1,000 girls). ASD prevalence is higher among non-Hispanic white children, non-Hispanic Black children, and Asian/Pacific Islander children (18.5, 18.3, and 17.9 per 1,000 children, respectively) than Hispanic children (15.4 per 1,000 children).³⁴



Children Ages Three to 21 With Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), Rhode Island, June 2000 – June 2020



Source: Rhode Island Department of Education, June 2000 – June 2020. Numbers include parentally placed students.

- ◆ In June 2020, there were 2,696 Rhode Island children ages three to 21 with ASD who received special education services.³⁵ The increase in number of children with ASD has been attributed, in part, to improved awareness and better screening and evaluation tools, as well as the broadening of the definition of ASD.³⁶ Early and appropriate identification and sustained interventions by skilled professionals can result in improvements in the levels of independent functioning of children and youth with ASD.^{37,38}

References

- ¹ Child and Adolescent Health Measurement Initiative. (n.d.). *2018-2019 National Survey of Children's Health: (NSCH) data query*. Retrieved April 14, 2021, from www.childhealthdata.org
- ² Health Resources & Services Administration: Maternal and Child Health Bureau. (2020). *Children with special health care needs*. Retrieved April 14, 2021, from mchb.hrsa.gov

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