

Prevention as Protection:

Children with disabilities in Rhode Island experience less maltreatment with early intervention.

Children with disabilities, developmental delay, or at risk of delay are at a higher risk of maltreatment, neglect, or abuse. However, a 2025 analysis of Rhode Island's federal Early Intervention (EI) program shows that those who participated were 45% less likely to be neglected later in life. This federal EI policy is designed to support parent's capacity to care for their child's specific developmental special needs from birth to age three.

This study demonstrates how the EI program may have additional protective factors such as dramatic reduction in child neglect (45%) and significant reduction in foster care placement, especially when implemented in the first year of life. The lifetime costs of neglect are substantial at \$230,000 per case. Early investment in EI can change these stories, making a real impact for families and the economy.

Key Findings:

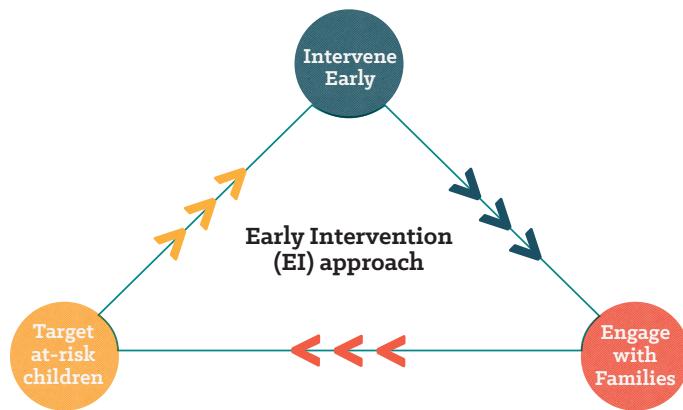
1. 45% reduction in maltreatment for children with disabilities, developmental delay or at risk for a delay who received early intervention in the first year.
2. Early intervention proved 3x more effective at reducing foster care placement when the program began in infancy.
3. An EI program serving the 16,000 children in this study would save \$70 to \$118 million in reduced costs of neglect alone.

“

Investing in families expands a parent's capacity when it comes to supporting their child's developmental needs.

About the Study

- **Design:** Quasi-experimental using EI-eligible vs. ineligible children as comparison groups
- **Sample:** 16,088 children with suspected or confirmed developmental delays in Rhode Island (2010–2019)
- **Follow-up:** Through 2023, tracking CPS records through age 12 for some children
- **Authors:** Anna Aizer (Brown University) & Emilia Brito Rebolledo (UCLA)



Policy Implications

Early is effective: Services begun in the first year have protective benefits years after receiving EI. Parents are seen as partners and encouraged to play a central role in their child's care.

State funding should be increased so that all eligible children have access to services. This would likely increase the number of at-risk children receiving services, reduce future maltreatment, and foster care placement.

Prevention makes dollars and cents: based on existing estimates of the lifetime cost of maltreatment, an early intervention program serving the 16,000 children in this sample would generate a savings of \$70-\$118 million in reduced costs of maltreatment alone, not including the other benefits of this program.

Anna Aizer, Brown University & Emilia Brito Rebolledo, UCLA
Can Early Intervention Reduce Future Child Maltreatment?, NBER Working Paper 33341.



Download the article