



# 2023 LEGISLATIVE UPDATE: FIRST SOUND

South Carolina's Early Hearing Detection and Intervention (EHDI) Program

**The First Sound program**, established by state law in 2001, conducts surveillance for the statewide mandate that all infants are screened for hearing loss at birth and, if applicable, receive diagnostic and intervention services. South Carolina is one of 48 states in the U.S. to have such legislation.

Approximately 3 out of every 1,000 children born in the United States have some degree of hearing loss. More than 90% of deaf children are born to hearing parents. Without early identification, parents would be unaware of the child's hearing loss until the child started showing signs of developmental delays for speech and language. Signs typically occur around 2 years of age, after a considerable amount of the critical window (birth-3 years of age) for language development has passed

## Program Highlights

- Identified 1,998 infants with hearing loss at birth since the start of the program in 2001
- Provided ongoing trainings to hospitals, audiologists, and internal stakeholders
- Partnered with Beginnings SC and SC Hands & Voices (family support organizations for deaf and hard of hearing) to host the 7th Annual Back to School Bash for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Students
- Partnered with Beginnings SC to conduct hearing screening trainings to early childhood centers across the state
- Provided a series of five virtual retreats/trainings for parents and/or professionals in partnership with Beginnings SC and The CARE Project
- One of seven states selected to participate in a Family Support and Engagement Learning Community, hosted by the National Center for Hearing Assessment and Management (NCHAM) and the Family Leadership in Language in Learning Center (FL3)
- One of two states invited to copresent with NCHAM and the FL3 on a national technical resource webinar representing the outcomes of the Learning Community
- First Sound Program Manager was appointed to serve on the Board of the Directors of Speech and Hearing Programs in State Health and Welfare Agencies (DSHPHWA)
- Partnered with Beginnings SC, BabyNet, and the SC School for the Deaf and Blind (SCSDB) to develop a co-branded resource for parents whose infants do not pass the hospital hearing screening. The objective is to provide further guidance for the journey beyond the initial screening

## Program Benchmarks

Since 2001, the First Sound program has diligently worked to meet the national goals and objectives for EHDI programs, including the “**1-3-6 Plan**”:

- 1** All infants should have access to hearing screening no later than **1 month of age**.
- 3** All infants who do not pass the hearing screening/rescreening should have diagnostic audiologic evaluation confirming hearing status by **3 months of age**.
- 6** All infants with a confirmed hearing loss should receive early intervention services as soon as possible following diagnosis but no later than **6 months of age**.

## Future Goals

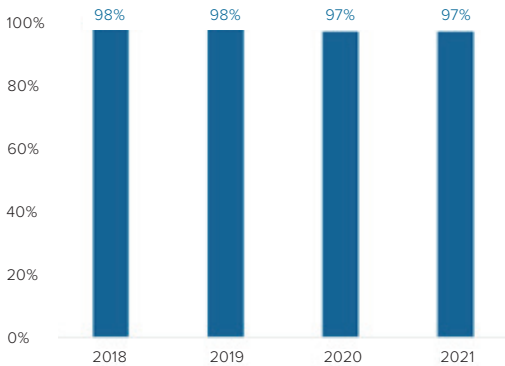
- Strengthen the ability of the First Sound program to make direct referrals to early intervention and family support organizations to increase the number of infants 1) identified with hearing loss by 3 months of age and 2) enrolled in early intervention services by 6 months of age
- Reduce the number of infants who are lost to follow up through partnerships with internal DHEC programs such as WIC, Birth Defects, and Children and Youth with Special Health Care Needs (CYSHCN)
- Expand diversity of family engagement in the EHDI systems through collaborative partnerships with deaf and hard of hearing family support organizations
- Partner with stakeholders in planning and hosting the first statewide Deaf and Hard of Hearing Conference for Families and Students
- Continue partnership with Beginnings SC to conduct hearing screening training to additional early childhood centers across the state
- Expand outreach to external stakeholders through a series of The CARE Project virtual retreats for parents and professionals
- Continue partnership with Beginnings SC conducting hearing screening training to additional early childhood centers across the state.



# South Carolina By The Numbers

## SC Newborn Hearing Screening Rate

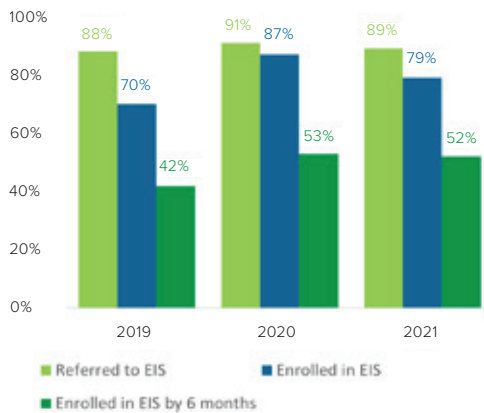
AAP Benchmark: 95% | 2020 National Average: 97.7%



The South Carolina newborn hearing screening rate among infants born in 2020 was 97%. The 2021 rate is above the American Academy of Pediatrics benchmark value of 95%.

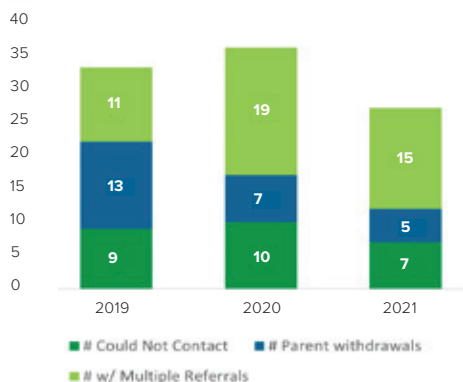
## Early Intervention for SC Infants with Permanent Hearing Loss

AAP Benchmark: 100% by 6 months old | 2020 National Average: 40.5%



The percentages of South Carolina infants who were identified with permanent hearing loss and referred for early intervention services (EIS) remained stable while the total receiving EIS decreased in 2021. The percentage of infants with permanent hearing loss receiving EIS by 6 months of age remained stable in 2021. South Carolina fell short of the American Academy of Pediatrics standard of 100% but exceeded the 2020 national average of 44.5%.

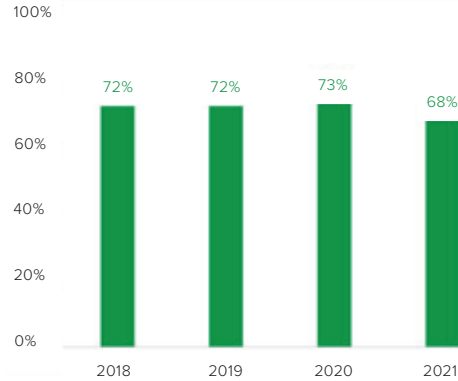
## Factors Impacting Early Intervention Services Enrollment by 6 months old



Factors contributing to delays in EI enrollment for infants with hearing loss include parent withdrawal prior to completion of enrollment process, unsuccessful attempts to make contact with the family, and multiple referral attempts prior to enrollment.

## SC Infants with Hearing Loss Where Loss is Confirmed by 3 Months

AAP Benchmark: 100% | 2020 National Average: 60.6%



The percentage of South Carolina infants with neonatal hearing loss who were confirmed by 3 months of age was stable from 2018-2020. In 2021, 68% of infants with confirmed hearing loss in South Carolina were diagnosed by 3 months.

While below the American Academy of Pediatrics standard of 100%, it is above the 2020 national average of 60.6%.

## Affirmation

“My son, Krishtian, was born at 39 weeks and we were thrilled to have had a smooth pregnancy and delivery - everything was ‘going right’ or as it should be, until the nurse came to get him for his hearing screening. He failed the hospital screening and they referred him for an outpatient ABR screening where he failed again. After further testing, he was diagnosed with bilateral severe-to-profound hearing loss at 3 months old.



Although it was an overwhelming feeling of anxiety and defeat when he was diagnosed, I am so glad we were able to find out sooner rather than later. Having the ability to learn early on that my child has bilateral hearing loss has given me so much strength to reach out to the resources my family will need to prepare, plan and set up a brighter future for our family.

When we received the audiologists' bills, we really had no clue how we were going to pay for all the tests my son had to undergo for his diagnosis. First Sound paid for his ABR screening tests and I am so grateful they did. I am thankful for the programs and resources available such as Babynet, First Sound, and TEFRA that help provide support to children with disabilities. To say the least, the old adage ‘it takes a village’ is so true. ”