



# First Sound

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

## 2025 LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

**First Sound**, South Carolina's Early Hearing Detection and Intervention (EHDI) 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 legislation requiring universal newborn hearing screening.

Approximately 3 out of every 1,000 children born in the United States have some degree of hearing loss, with more than 90% of deaf children 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/or language. Without early identification and intervention, these 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 2,195 infants as Deaf or Hard of Hearing (DHH) 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 (DHH family support organizations) to host the 9th Annual Back to School Bash for DHH Students
- Partnered with Beginnings SC to conduct hearing screening trainings to early childhood centers across the state
- First Sound Unit Manager continued to serve on the Board of Directors of Speech and Hearing Programs in State Health and Welfare Agencies (DSHPSHWA)

### Program Benchmarks

Since 2001, First Sound 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.

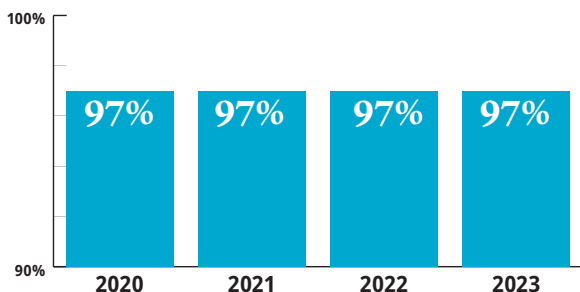
### Future Goals

- 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 with hearing loss who are 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 intra-agency partnerships with programs such as Birth Defects, Children and Youth with Special Health Care Needs (CYSHCN), and Postpartum Newborn Home Visitation Program (PPNBHV)
- Expand family engagement in the EHDI systems through collaborative partnerships with DHH family support organizations
- Partner with stakeholders in planning and hosting the third bi-annual statewide DHH conference for families and students
- Collaborate with hospital NICU staff to ensure timely audiological follow-up post discharge
- Modernize the First Sound data collection system

## South Carolina By The Numbers

### South Carolina Newborn Hearing Screening Rate

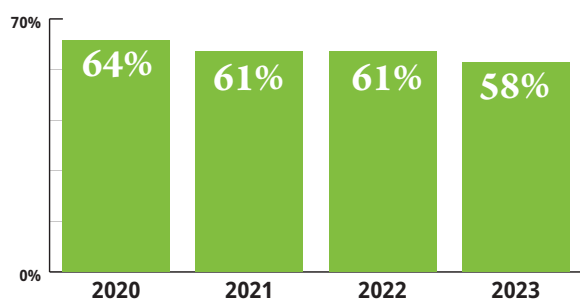
AAP Benchmark: 95% | 2022 National Average: 97%



The South Carolina newborn hearing screening rate remains stable and above the American Academy of Pediatrics benchmark value of 95%.

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

AAP Benchmark: 100% | 2022 National Average: 62%

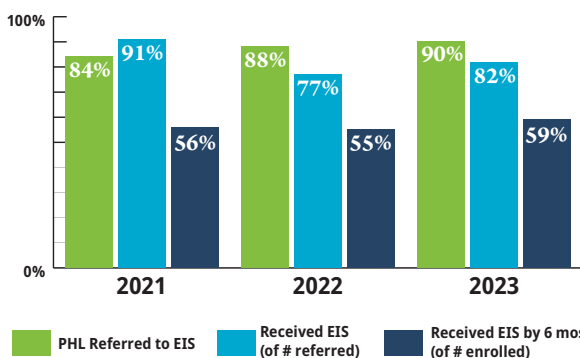


In 2023, 58% of infants with confirmed hearing loss in South Carolina were identified by 3 months.

*NOTE: Includes babies discharged from NICU which is most often past the benchmark timeline.*

### Early Intervention for SC Infants with Permanent Hearing Loss

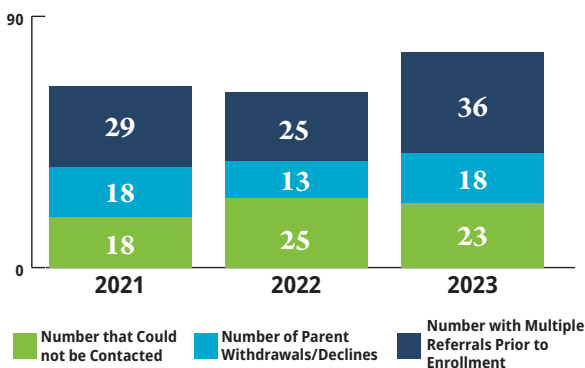
AAP Benchmark: 100% by 6 months old | 2022 National Average: 67.7%



Early intervention data points remained stable for 2023.

*NOTE: Includes babies discharged from NICU, which is most often past the benchmark timeline.*

### 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 contact the family, and multiple referral attempts being needed prior to an infant's successful enrollment.

## Affirmation

Gemma was born early at 35 weeks and was in the NICU when we found out that she may have hearing loss. This was detected through her newborn hearing screening. Because of this, we were referred to an audiologist before leaving the hospital. We later found out that Gemma had bilateral sensorineural hearing loss when she was about 2 months old. Because of the early detection of her hearing loss, we were able to get her hearing aids by the time she was 4 months old in order to give her full hearing access at an early age.

When we were told Gemma had bilateral sensorineural hearing loss, I was completely lost on what we needed to do in order to support her in every way that we possibly could. I immediately started doing research and was referred to Beginnings SC. I quickly signed up for parent trainings and began working with Beginnings SC. Shortly after, we were presented with the opportunity to attend the EHDI conference in Denver, CO in March of 2024 through the First Sound program. Without the newborn hearing screening program, I am afraid that Gemma's hearing loss may not have been detected until much later. Because she was able to get her hearing aids so early after being diagnosed, she has been able to have access to language during critical periods and her language skills are similar to those of other children her age.

I am forever grateful for the First Sound program and the knowledge, support, and resources that Beginnings SC has provided. I no longer feel lost on how to navigate parenting a child with hearing loss. I have been able to grow as one of Gemma's biggest advocates with their assistance.

— **Laura Hunte,**  
**York County**

